KACHCHH

The Last Frontier

T.S. Randhawa

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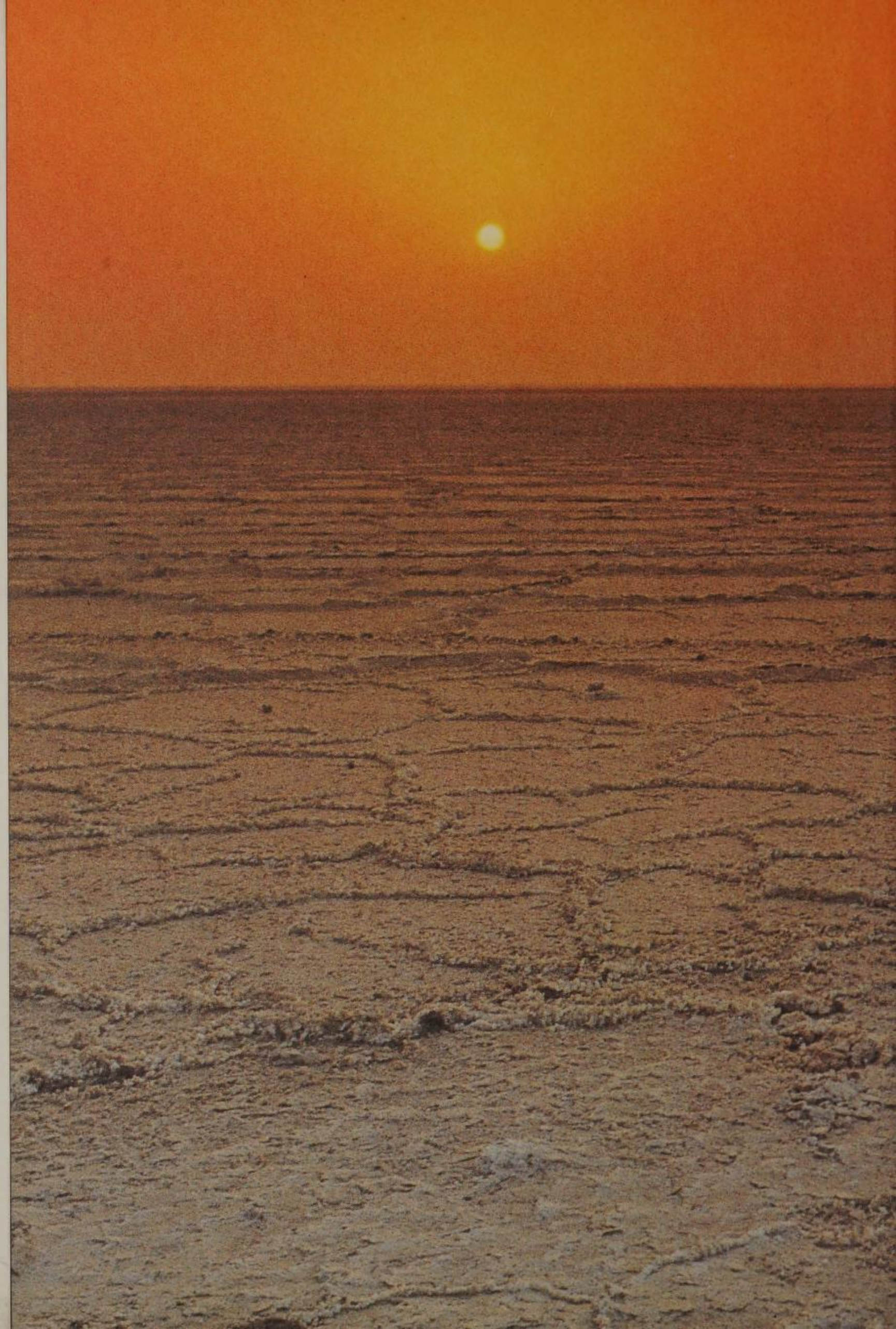
This book is a fascinating visual record of the faraway western corner of India, obscure Kachchh, which is the last frontier of a fading way of life.
Kachchh is a mystery land, not easy to comprehend. Its vast length and breadth cannot easily be covered, and it is greater in area than some states of India. The evocative photographs take the reader to its wide horizons and remote settlements, inhabited by people of diverse races and religions. It is a land that time had forgetten.
The author shares images of this picturesque land and its diverse ecosystems, the dazzling Great Rann of Kachchh, quaint harbours and other antiquities. The text supplements information about its history, myths and people. This is the first such illustrated and informative book on this outlying region of India.



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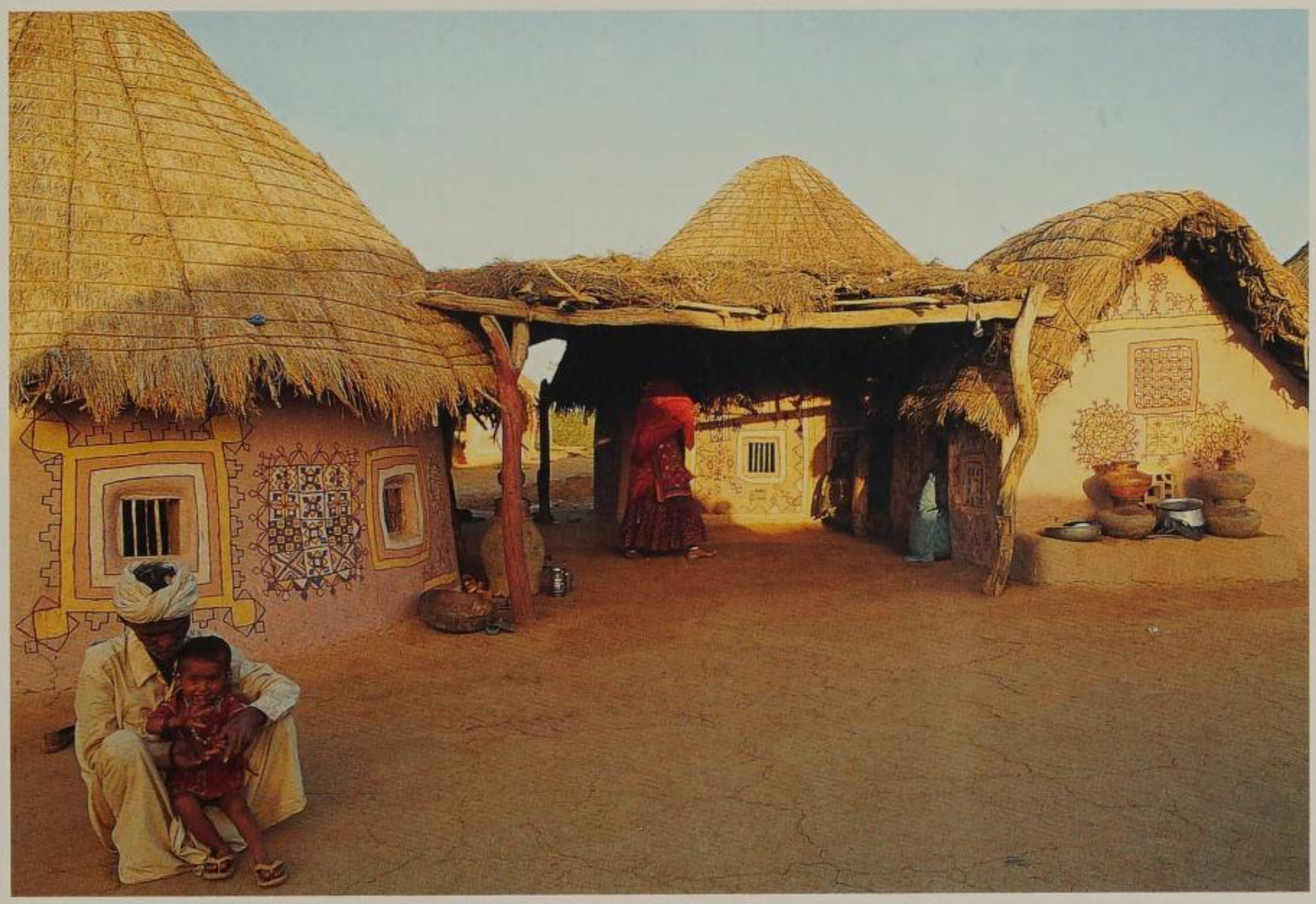

First published 1998
Reprinted 2001
Copyright © Prakash Book Depot
M-86, Connaught Circus
New Delhi-110001
India
Tel: 3326897 Fax: 3326566
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ISBN: 87-7234-011-7

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Prakash Books

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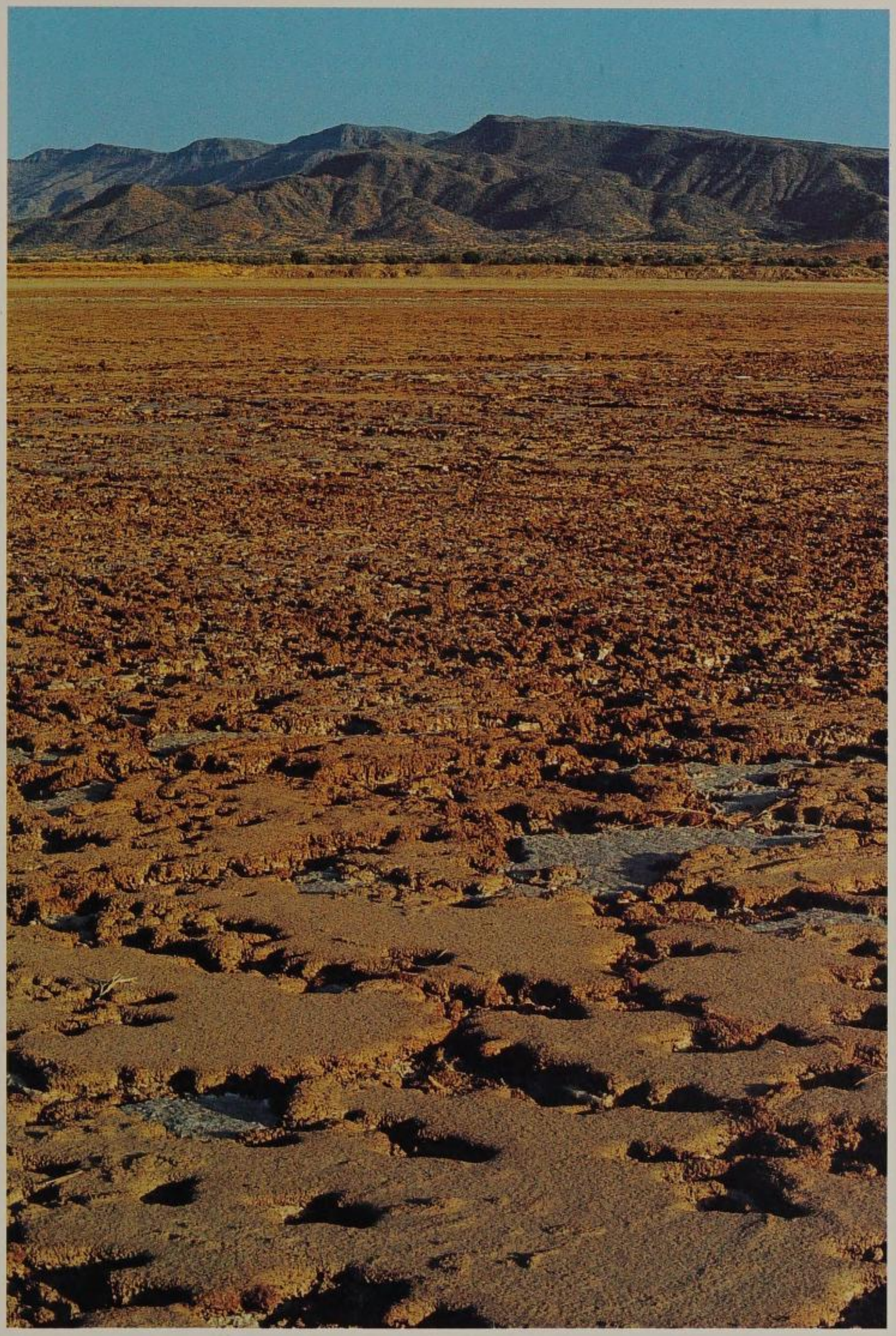
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Kantisen Shroff has encouraged the writing and publishing of some excellent books on India. If it had not been for him, Ashwin Mehta's work on the Himalayas, 'Encounters with Enternity', would not have seen the light of day, nor his book, '100 Himalayan Flowers', reached libraries all over India, gratis. Ramsinh Rathod's publication on Kachchhi painting was also helped by him.

When this book was thought of, I was hesitant. A long association with the subject area adds to one's knowledge immensely, but also demystifies it. A voyeurist author might be better for a romanticised book on a place like Kachchh. In fact most of the photographs in this book were taken by me on visits before I was actually posted to Kachchh as Collector and District Magistrate. However, Kantibhai persisted as Kachchh is his homeland and he is extremely attached to it. The result is this book. This, chronicle does not have statistics, reams of which are easily available from the many government offices. Nor is it a chronicle, in first person, of great moments in district life, though there were many. It is a visual attempt to capture the essence of this land.

Without Kantisen Shroff's encouragement this book would not have been possible. I would also like to thank Dipesh Shroff, Ashwin Shroff, Manoj Gohel and Chiranjiv Singh; Himmatsinhji, Pragmalji III and Rudrasinh Jadeja; J.D. Trivedi, Dilip Vaidya and Kachchh Museum; A Wazir, P. Jethi and Aina Maha Museum; Vijay Kotak and P.H. Bhatti; Surendra and Bhramagna Patel for the colour processing; Shrujan, Vivekananda Research and Training Institute and Excel.

Moonrise in the Great Rann, in the stillness of dusk.



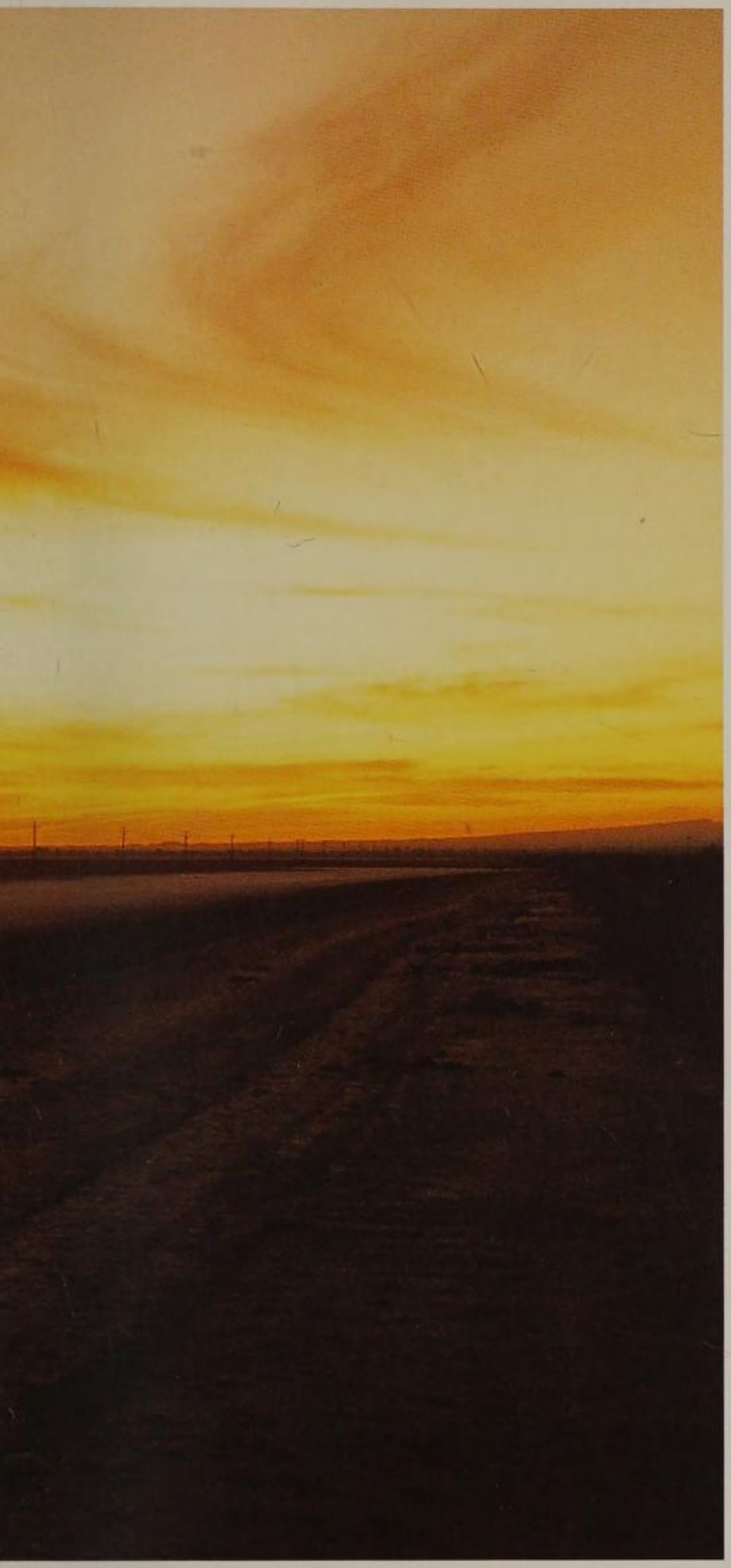
The sentinel mountain Kala Dungar, on the Great Rann's edge.

PRELUDE

From the highest point of Bhujia hill, the Serpent Temple welcomes travellers on their approach to Bhuj. The walled city lies in an amphitheatre of hills and presented an imposing appearance to Captain MacMurdo in 1818, with "... a number of white buildings, mosques and pagodas, interspersed with plantations of date trees." Fifty-one guns protected the city, the gates of which used to be locked at night and the keys delivered to the Maharao in person. In 1548, Bhuj had been chosen by Rao Khengarji as his capital and the walls were built by Rao Godji. The fort on Bhujia hill was completed by Maharao Desalji and though it was not great as a defence net, it added a considerable charm to the landscape, resting like a crown on Bhujia hill. In history, Bhuj has been attacked six times and only twice has the defence been successful. Multi-storeyed concrete structures now dot Bhuj and the population burst through its polygonal walls some decades ago.

The British came to Kachchh with gusto in the beginning of the nineteenth century. They even annexed the eastern part of Kachchh, having a Collector at Anjar, in addition to a Resident at Bhuj. After the middle of the nineteenth century, Sindh having been taken and Kabul not remaining a great threat to the British in this region, the importance of Kachchh diminished. Bombay grew into a magnificent port and those of Kachchh declined. Starting around that time, there occurred from Kachchh to Bombay, what might be called in modern parlance, a tremendous brain drain. All those who could afford to do so, left for better opportunities in Bombay. Nearly half of the present populace of Kachchhi descent now resides in Bombay and some in

Sunset in the Great Rann of Kachchh.



Great Britain and parts of East Africa. Their remittances made back home have resulted in the partial money-order economy of Kachchh.

Kachchhis have done extremely well in trade and industry in Bombay and some of the major houses are controlled by them. The call of the roots is now bringing back many of their succeeding generations, having dual residences in Bombay and Kachchh. Some come with the genuine intention of ploughing back into Kachchh the profits they made outside, alongwith new ideas. Others build great temples for their communities. There are also those who want to barter their surplus money for power and are ably assisted by local power brokers who, apart from benefitting themselves, direct the money to charities, the rituals of donations to cow upkeep centres during drought being considered most worthy and politic. A vacuum for good leadership in Kachchh aids this process and budding candidates make chauvinistic statements about Kachchh from Bombay, the 'development' bandwagon being a good thing to be on in any case. Others simply make an annual pilgrimage to Kachchh for a few days during festivals and air their locked houses.

Earlier, in its splendour as a great coastline, trading with African countries and having land routes to Sindh, Baluchistan, Persia and parts of India – Gujarat, Kathiawar and Marwar – Kachchh had become an interesting ethnic cauldron. The quantum jump of half of its population across the Kathiawar peninsula to Bombay and other parts of the world was followed by a period of relative isolation for those who stayed back – the nomads dependent on grazing land, the artisan service groups who provided articles of daily use, agriculturists, traders and some others. Only now, with a greater infrastructure of roads and rails, is this insularity breaking down. Therefore, what one sees in Kachchh now is a remarkable collection of ethnic specimens *in-situ*, an anthropologist's delight. It has been interesting work trying to understand these different groups, in this last frontier of a vanishing way of life.

Amongst my favourites are the Rabaris. Honest and hardworking, isolated in their quaint hamlets, only now are they getting organised under a nascent leadership which leaves much to be desired. Even in the worst times of drought, rarely did a Rabari stretch his hand out for state help. On tours to their settlements, it used to be after considerable prodding that they mentioned their hardships to me. A trip to Bhuj for the paper-work was an unattractive task for them and would take some weeks. In a case of restoring grazing rights I had to climb up to the Rabari village of Sanosara twice to remind and request the *sarpanch* to come down to Bhuj where the records were and officers also available. On the other hand there are also Rabaris still dressed in traditional attire from turban to toe but modern enough to own and operate large fleets of trucks.

Living in their reed huts on the Lakhpat coast are the Fakirani Jath, equally graceful, under their traditional chief. However, the Dhanetah and Garasia Jaths are irrepressible. In a scarcity year they build up a steady clamour for government doles for their cattle and after a flood they will request compensation for animals which are claimed to have been washed away. Then there is the vast group of Ahir cowherds, now dominating the transport business. The potters, weavers and artisans are there and other interesting friends. The first love of the Patels of Kachchh is land and they have a great ability to extract water from the deepest recesses of the earth's bosom. There are remote *sthans*, shrines and *dargahs* with their devoted keepers and priests as well as other operators in ochre. An indescribable love for their land makes other people cling to desolate villages with hardly any economic activity, where even the water has to be piped from a hundred kilometers away by the administration. There are philanthropists as well as sharks.

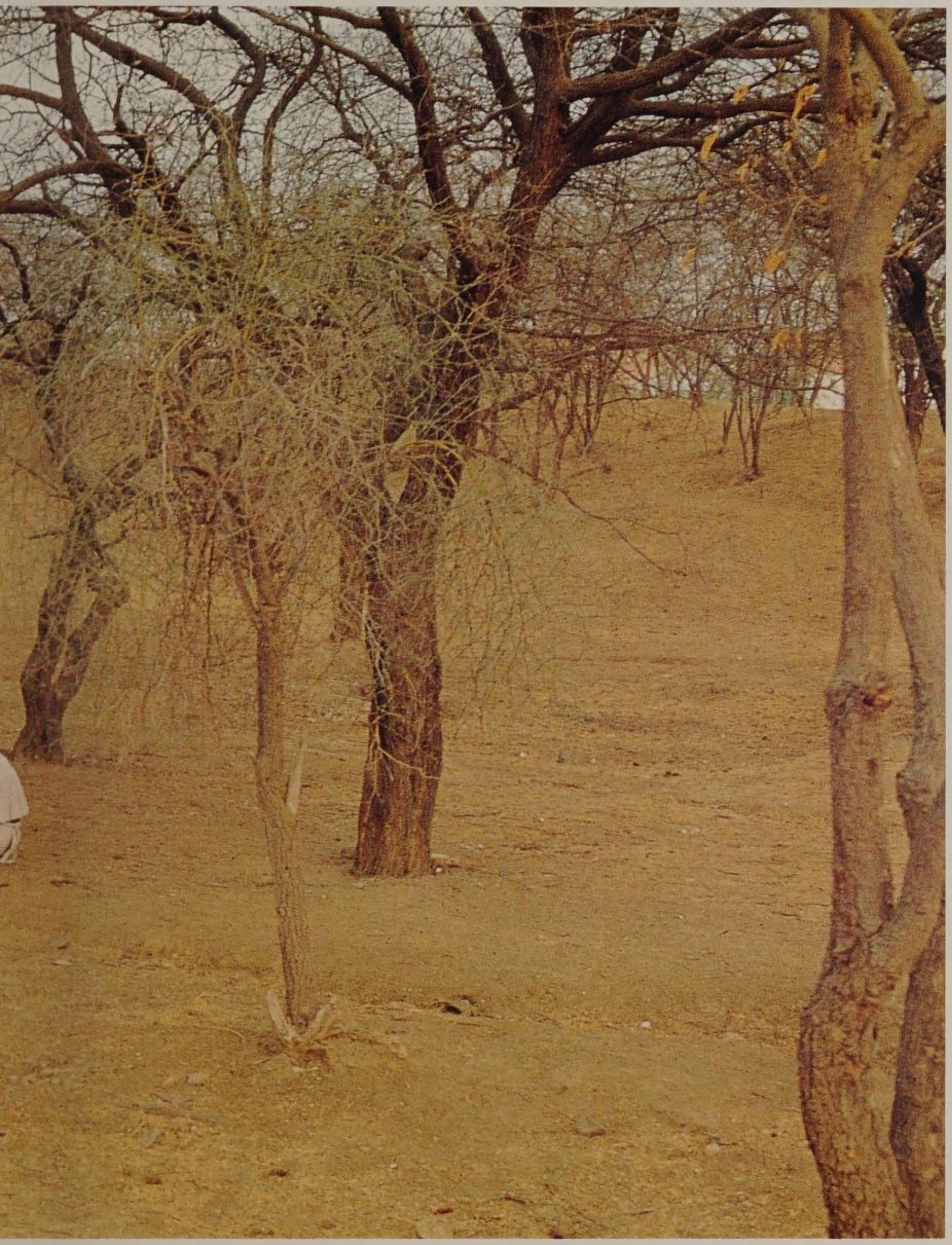
An array of salt pans at the fishing village of Jakkau in the Gulf of Kachchh.

Add to this a motley officialdom, a few in Kachchh by choice and some despatched to this far away district as a measure of chastisement. This is Kachchh, with a complete range of humanity — the good, bad and the ugly. On the whole a remarkable land.

Adding to the quaint flavour of Kachchh is the living presence of historical figures. In the Aina Mahal it seems as if Lakhpatji's dancing girls are about to break into a performance. One might imagine that at the turn of a corner one will come across Ramsinh Malam, Aina Mahal's builder. Mac-Murdo's ghosts is still said to move around in his bungalow at Anjar, now the Deputy Collector's office. Punja Seth and his likes still appear to move furtively, plotting and scheming. One visualises Jamadar Fateh Muhammad, munificent during his first term but capricious in his second spell due to the ungratefulness shown to him by his Kachchhi subjects. Legends about the rulers of Kachchh abound and are told with great eloquence by their successor, Pragmalji III. Than (Dhinodhar), with its *samadhis,* has a strange attraction. At Lakhpat one can mediate in one of the many temples, *dargahs* or the *gurdwara,* all in splendid isolation. Or one can expect the Jakhs to fly into their temples any minute. The birds of Kachchh add to this feeling of timelessness. The Dhand is a great place for bird-watching and I never missed an opportunity to go there. In fact, given two alternate routes to places lying across the Dhand, like Haji Pir, I always preferred the tracks across the marshes. One could almost touch the flamingoes, cranes and sandgrouse, though the birds have an uncanny habit of disappearing during tours of outside dignitaries to see them.

Indian chroniclers have not been too unkind to the British for their interlude in Kachchh. In fact the Jadeja *bhayyad,* brotherhood of chiefs, had itself petitioned the British to intervene in Kachchh affairs and assisted them in dethroning Rao Bharmalji. The British also were not unhappy with the turn of events as it gave them an

A group of Rabari pastoralists in a scrub jungle.



opportunity to curb piracy off the Kachchh coast and the raids of bandits from Kachchh bases into Kathiawar. It also afforded an opportunity to them for securing their border with Sindh. Since no British account of an area is without an estimate of revenue, this certainly would have been on their minds. However, all that the desert kingdom of Kachchh had to offer them were birds, salt and cattle – no bulk income or treasures.

The birds found admirers in many British officers. The potential of Kachchh to flood the market with salt was realised by the British and they put into force an agreement banning its exportation from Kachchh. The cattle of Kachchh have remained somewhat of an enigma, even at present. With nomads and their cattle wandering all over with visible presence, one gets an impression that Kachchh possesses great numbers. Actually, though significant, it is less than the stall-fed cattle populations of other regions. Even today when drought hits Kachchh, the condescending commiserations of other district administrations is soon changed to hectic work when Kachchhi *maldharis* reach them and knock on their doors for government fodder. Many herders camp in the state capital and it does not take long for a democratic government to accede to their request for free cattle camps.

In their enthusiasm after acquiring Anjar in 1816, the British installed their Collector who proceeded to go about the work of collecting revenue. On realising soon that nothing much was on offer they dropped Anjar quickly in 1822, giving it back to the Rao on payment of a yearly sum of 'Ahmedabad Sicca Rupees 88,000'. Kachchh still did not oblige and even this amount was written off in 1832. Their interest in Kachchh further declined with the annexations of Sindh and Baluchistan and with the cream of the Kachchhi mercantile community migrating to Bombay. They remained content with having a Resident or Political Agent at Bhuj to keep an eye on the

The grand volcano Dhinodhar. Kachchhi folklore links it with the formation of the Rann.

affairs. Some beneficial projects were inspired by the British, like the Mandvi harbour breakwater and bringing in the first telegraph line. Due courtesies were given to the senior position of the royal house of Kachchh amongst other rulers of Kathiawar and Gujarat. Exalted titles were bestowed and Kachchh was accorded a seventeen-gun salute, on a maximum scale of twenty-one. However, the main contribution of the British in Kachchh was the wiping out of the evils of slave trade, infanticide and *sati*, widow burning on the deceased husband's pyre.

A dark picture had been painted of Kachchh by the British during the beginning of the nineteenth century. Even if such reports were exaggerated, there is no doubt that Kachchh was passing through difficult times. Law and order had certainly collapsed but what would have shaken any observer was the extreme degree to which the evils of slave trade, female infanticide, and *sati* had taken root in Kachchhi society. Slave trade was the first to be eradicated. The account of infanticide given in an earlier gazetteer makes chilling reading. "The child's life was generally taken by giving it milk drugged with opium, or it was smothered by drawing the umbilical cord over the face, or it was left to die of weakness or of want of care. When a girl was born the father was seldom told, all he heard was that his wife had delivered and that the child was in heaven. On this he bathed and nothing more was said. Sometimes the mother refused to take the babe's life. Then the father was called and unless, which was rare, his heart softened, he vowed neither to enter the house nor eat till the child was dead. Shrinking from it at first, women soon approved of the custom and when old were keener than the men that no girl's life should be spared." In 1842 the ratio of Jadeja girls to boys was as low as one in eight. The practice was not confined to only females or the Jadejas.

The Jadeja *bhayyad* did not follow the system of primogeniture but equal division

Left: The legendary Dhoramnath's shrine on Dhinodhar's crown. Above and right: Interesting basalt formations and vegetation inside the crater.

of property amongst the male heirs. Even if primogeniture had been there it would not have made much difference because the remaining heirs would be virtual paupers. This was so even though they had no levy to give to their ruler. In Rajasthan also female infanticide was prevalent but what made matters worse in Kachchh was the system of hypergamy practised by the Jadejas. It was customary for the Jadejas to accept in marriage fair maidens from the Sodha community which was below the Jadeja in the social heirarchy. To find suitable Jadeja youths or families equal or higher in status for Jadeja brides was thus made more difficult. Their earlier conversion did not help matters and lowered them in the eyes of stauncher Rajputs of the adjoining regions of Marwar and Kathiawar. "And since then their loneliness, their pride and their poverty made tribes hold aloof, who might otherwise have married them."

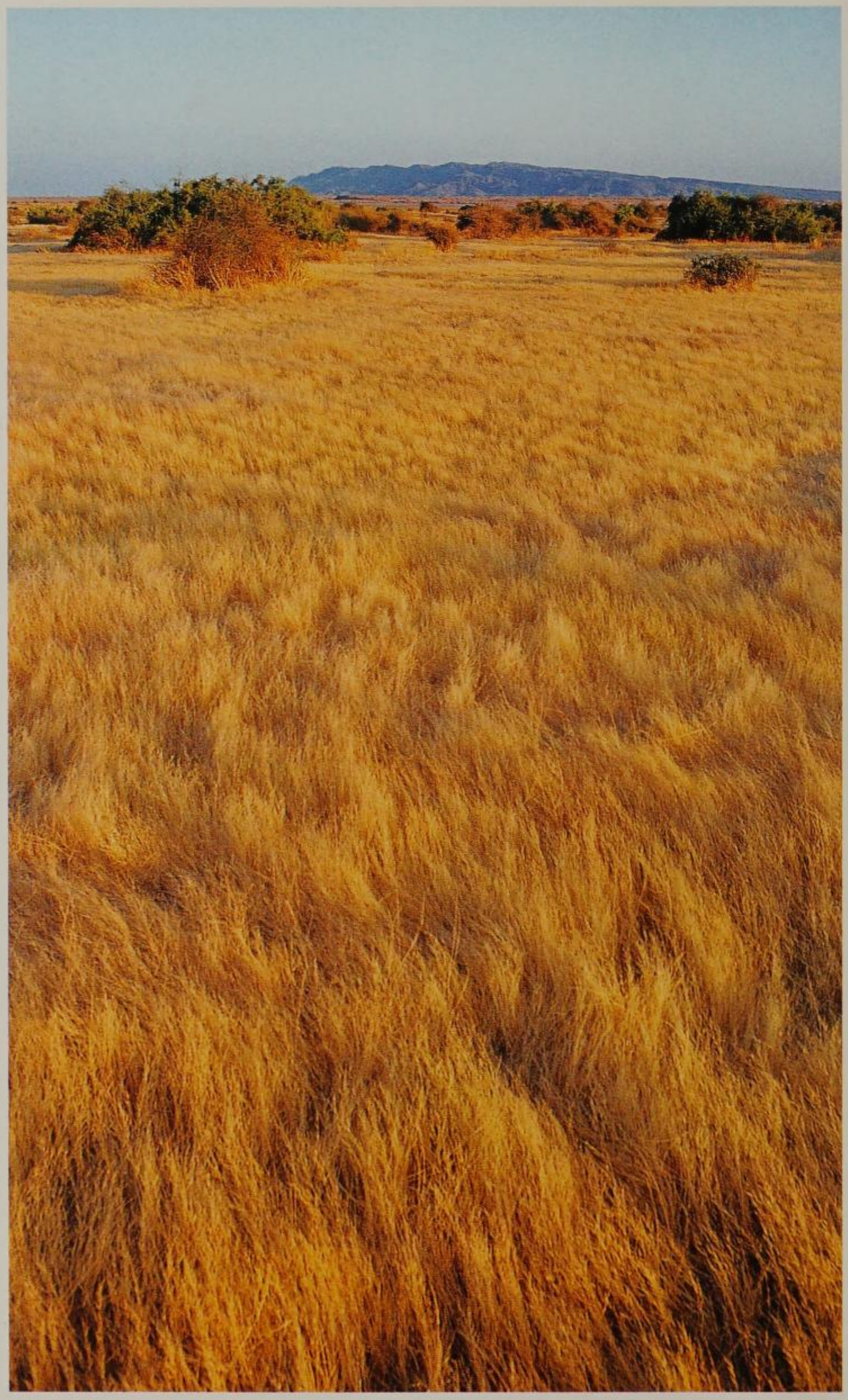
The Treaty of 1819 had made explicit mention that this practice was to be abolished. Further agreements with the leading Jadejas of the *bhayyad* enjoined them to desist from this practice or face punishment. Individual Jadejas were bound to maintain an accurate account of all the sons and daughters born in the *bhayyad*, for rendering to the *durbar* according to a set form. "A skilful midwife, such as shall be approved of by the Durbar writers I will always entertain as a servant, and she will every two months travel through all the villages belonging to my clan, and come and inform me of the number of women in labour and the number of months, that she and I may be able to give an account to the Durbar writer when he comes round... Thus as is written above, the account of women in child labour being kept, after nine months I will cause inquiry to be made, and take great care about it and not neglect it." The saving clause was that, "Should any of the wives of my brethren go abroad or into any other country, or to the homes of their fathers, and there have female infants and put them to death, this will not be on my head. I only answer for what may take place

in my country." In 1844 an Infanticide Fund was instituted by the British and the Kachchh Durbar to give pecuniary assistance to poor Jadejas for meeting the costs of marrying their daughters.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, infanticide had been checked but preventing *sati* was to prove more difficult. It was so ingrained in society that, unlike the prevention of infanticide, no mention was made in the Treaty of 1819. Since it continued in Kachchh till a later date than in the neighbouring regions of India, there are accounts of widows coming from outside to immolate themselves here, with symbolic articles of their dead husbands. The nineteenth-century traveller Marianne Postans has recorded one gruesome *sati* that not only she witnessed, but to which even the British Resident at Bhuj had to be a helpless spectator.

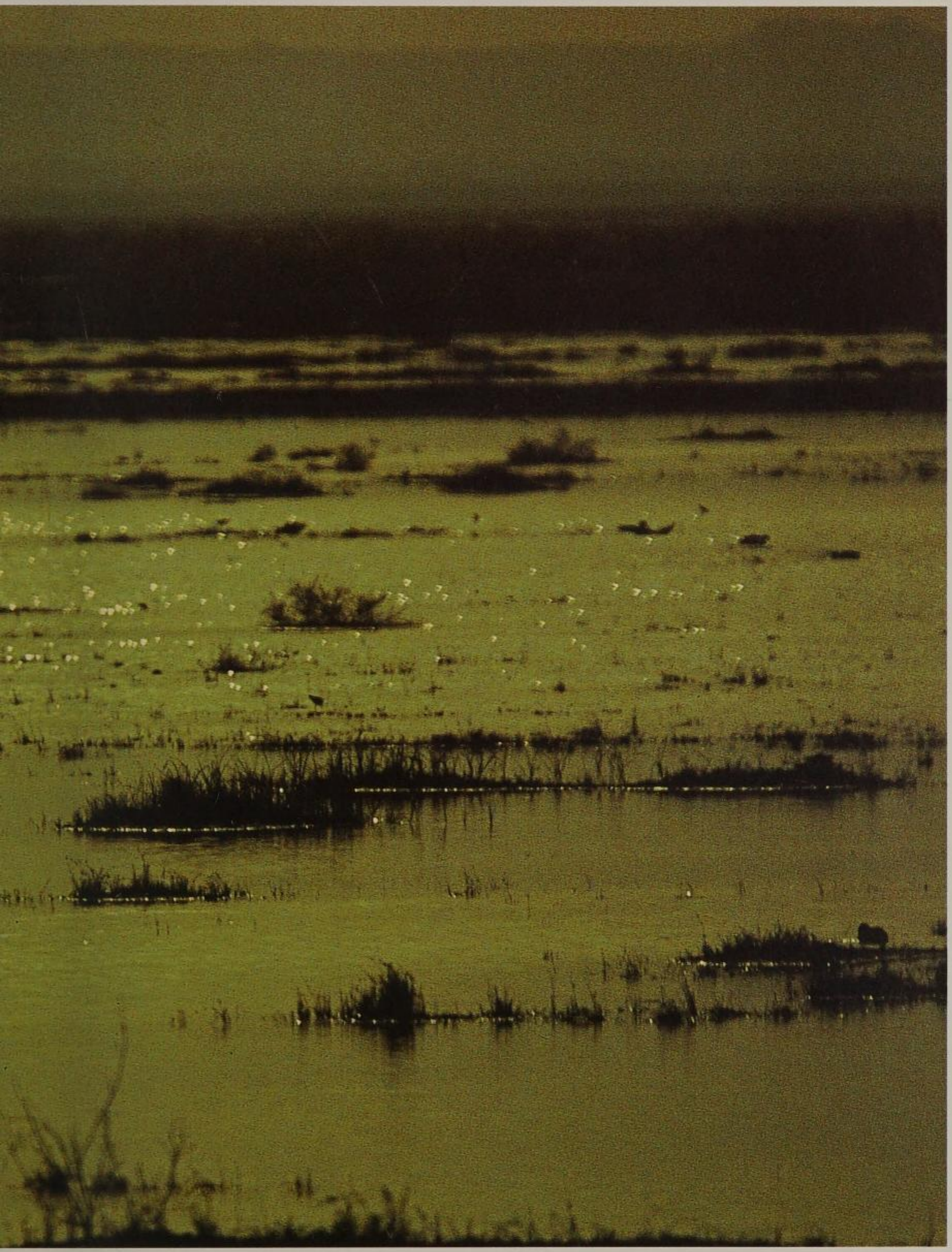
Over the years the practice of *sati* was eliminated. However, this was not before Kachchh was dotted with *paliyas*, stone memorials, dedicated to women who had committed *sati*. They normally bear the carving of a raised female hand or an outline of a woman. Even children were not spared, a natural consequence of such sordid proceedings. Some *sati* stones indicate this by showing a child in the woman's arms. The ritual of child marriage, however, continued into the twentieth century.

The Treaty of 1819 guaranteed the integrity of Kachchh from foreign enemies and a British force was located in Kachchh for which an amount was to be paid. This lulled the Kachchh Durbar into reducing the number in its own force. Also, the 1819 treaty had limited the hiring of Arab and other mercenaries. The result was that towards the end of the nineteenth century the Kachchh Durbar forces, which had once defeated the Mughal Viceroy Sarbuland Khan, were reduced to about two dozen artillery men, a few hundred cavalry, about a thousand infantry and an irregular force of three to four thousand men that the *bhayyad* could furnish on payment. The



Top: The Banni pastureland during drought. Above and left: The Banni in good times and during floods.

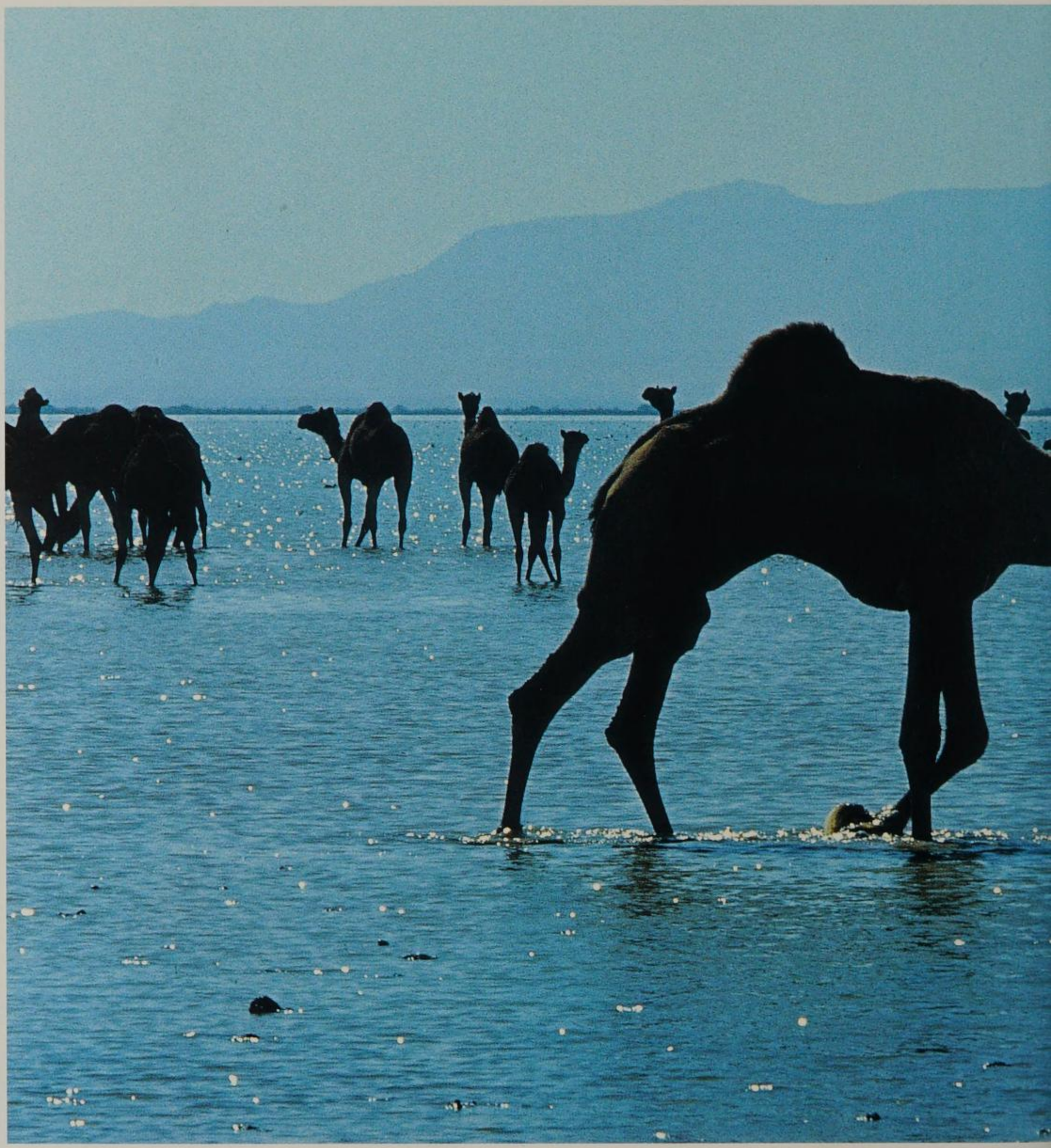
The vast Dhand marshlands are sanctuary for birds migrating from Central Asia to Africa.



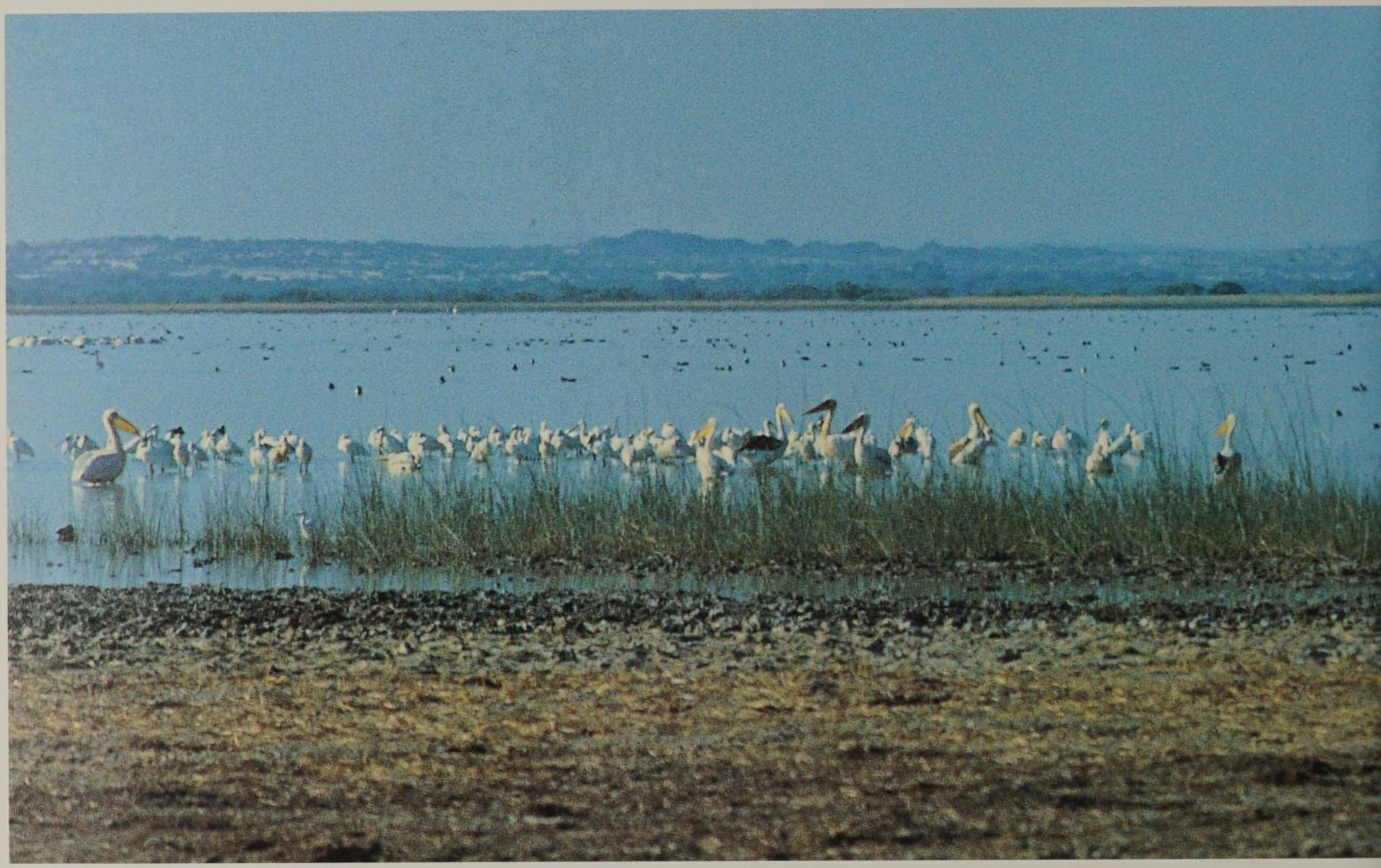
1819 earthquake had levelled many village forts and the Maharao also entered into deeds with the major *bhayyad* members wherein they agreed not to construct or rebuild their forts. Peaceful times were ahead for Kachchh.

The physical extremities of Kachchh are well defined. In the north and east are the Great Rann and the Little Rann of Kachchh, in the south the Gulf of Kachchh, in the west the Arabian Sea and the tidal marshes and creeks, some of them being part of the Indus delta system. It is the largest district, even larger than some states of India. The present population is about one and a quarter million people. It is almost like an island and before the road entrance at Surajbari was made it was a boat ride connection to Kathiawar. Inside Kachchh were the other semi-islands of Pachham, Khadir and Bela, now connected by permanent roads. What makes Kachchh so interesting is the great variety of land and water, plain and hill, desert and fertile land. All this has resulted in a variety of eco-systems snuggling close to each other like the Banni grassland and the Dhand marshes to the south of it, Kala Dungar in Pachham, the spectacular Great Rann, the open plains of Lakhpat and Jakhau, the mangrove swamps off Koteshwar and Mundra, and the Gulf of Kachchh with its coral reefs and creeks.

The ecology and heritage of Kachchh is now under threat, until concern transcends local considerations. Underground water is depleting rapidly, sucked by pumps having no direct relation between operating costs and consumption or waste, running on heavily subsidised electricity. Salinity ingress along the coastal and Rann areas is much talked about. An extensive scheme had been prepared but since the cost ran into many millions it could not be made operational. A low cost solution for the edge of the Rann areas lies in constructing embankments during relief work operations, which are liberally authorised during the periodic bouts of scarcity and drought. Sur-

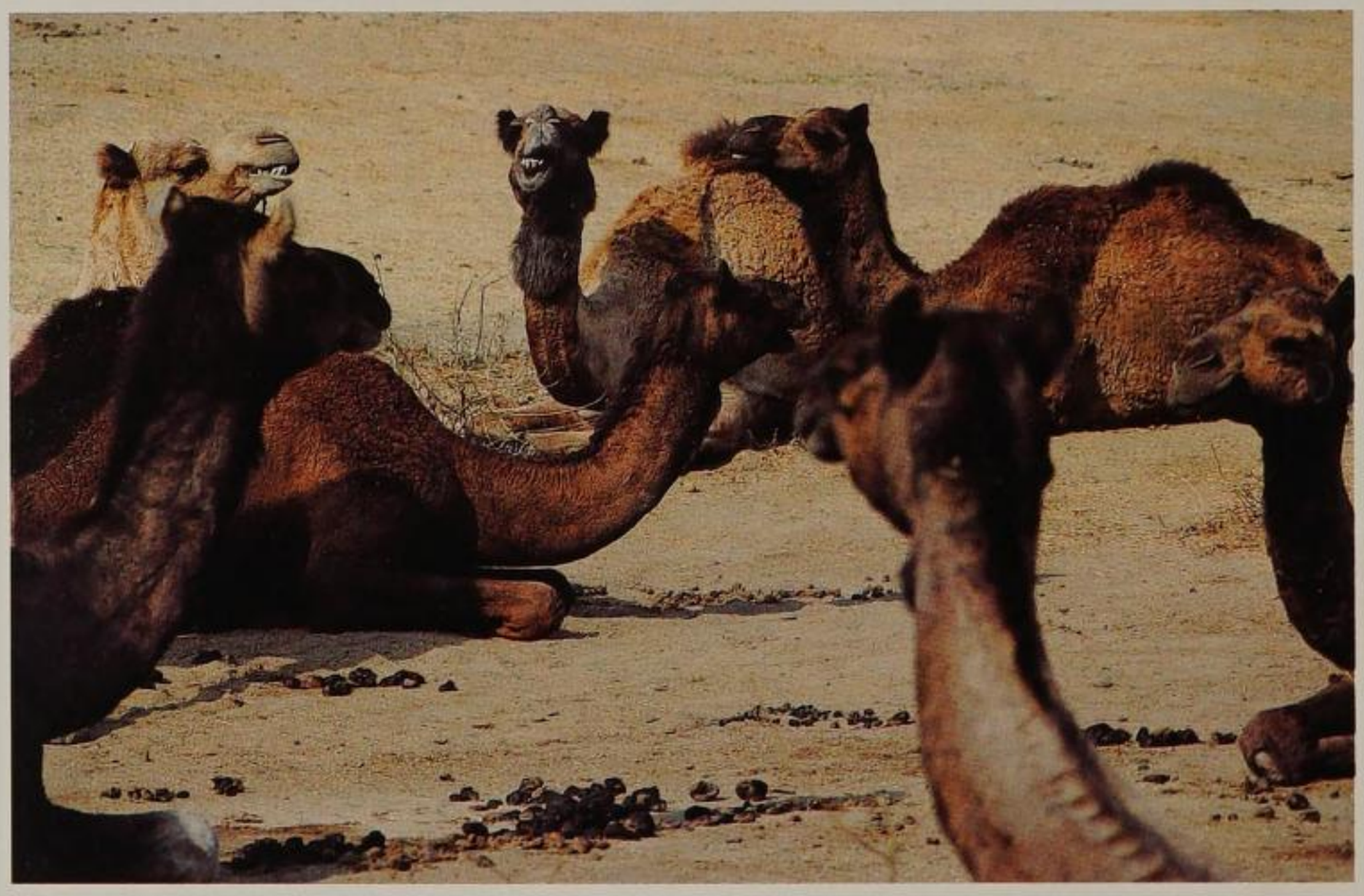


Camels cooling off at the Dhand, with Dhinodhar in the background. The Kachchhi camel easily takes to marshlands and slushy areas of the Rann.



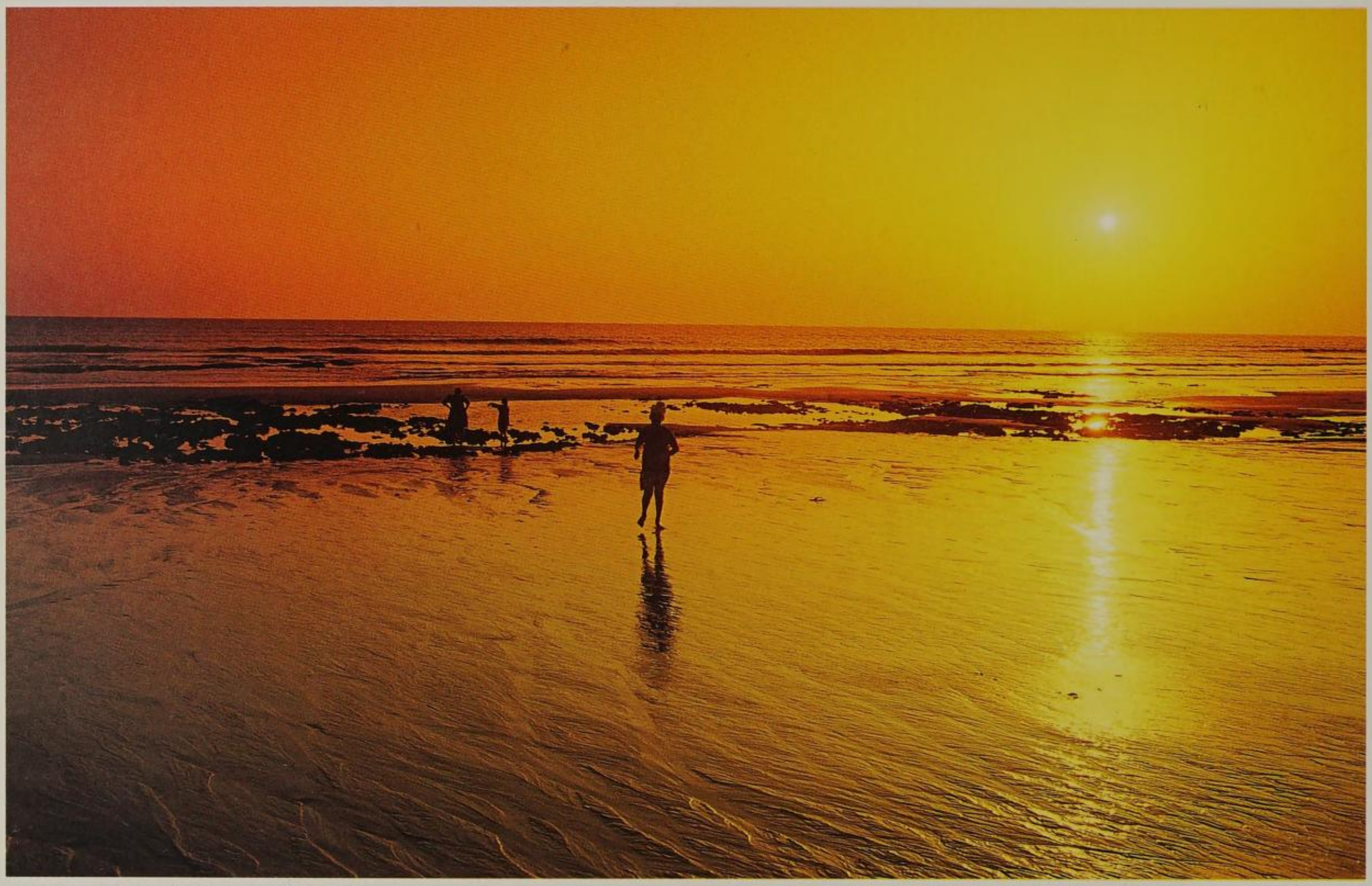
Migratory pelicans and flamingoes at the Dhand. In a cycle of once in a decade, when conditions are favourable, flamingoes descend in thousands to breed on islands in the Great Rann.

prisingly, however, much motivation is required to enthuse the inhabitants of even settlements in the direct range of the spreading salt wastes, to take up such works. The famed Banni pastureland had been described in Burnes' map as a "region full of wells" in the middle of the nineteenth century. Today it is degraded and the local graziers have only themselves to blame. Dry cattle are brought from as far as Bombay until the area is over-grazed. (By the order of an earlier Collector, sheep and goats were banned from entering it, in an attempt to preserve it.) The worst attack on Bhujia hill was made not in the historical past but only recently by modern society. One face has been mined and badly scarred, and similar attempts were also made on Dhinodhar and Roha. The land is pock-marked with irregular quarrying. Some years ago the city elders of Bhuj leased out public land to a brick kiln right next to the famous *chattris,* cenotaphs, at Hamirsar lake, in the heart of the city. Planting *prosopis juliflora* has been a mixed blessing, its growth having choked even rivers beds, due to which rain waters flood and wash away fertile land. Of the few panthers left in the wild, in Kachchh, not a year passes without one being poisoned; for no great reason. Once we had started a drive to unearth illegal arms, the possession of which was not only a crime but which were also being used for decimating the already depleted wildlife. There was a strong protest from an elected representative of the people that this should not be done as the poachers would be deprived of their livelihood. Government departments, too, miss the overall view while going about their programmes. The Mandvi fort wall was sought to be broken to make place for a highway. The remnant of the Anjar fort was gifted away to someone. Hundreds of acres in the pastureland of eastern Banni nearly had *prosopis juliflora* planted in them for a project. Fishing contracts are attempted in the waters of the Dhand which would affect the annual migration of birds over Kachchh and the sub-



Top: Amity amongst a nomads' animals. Above: A 'meeting' of camels.

The wild ass of Kachchh. It is found only in the Little Rann of Kachchh.



Pingleshwar beach in the Gulf of Kachchh.

continent. The case of the Narayansarovar sanctuary is now well known. Other such examples abound, though there has been some success in resolving such issues and bringing about greater awareness of the ecology and heritage of Kachchh.

Change in any society is inevitable and this region is no exemption, even though it is removed from the mainstream of civilization. Kachchh is now going through upheavlas in its social fabric, a departure from its earlier tranquil way of life. Even in the limited period of fifteen years or so that I have been coming to Kachchh, one cannot help noticing the quickening of this process of social change, whether it is subtle like the Rabaris of Tunda finally getting their Devi's permission to raise a temple of concrete in her honor or bold, like trying to bring the tremendous potential of the Great Rann into productive use. However, while it would be unfair, for example, for a globe-trotting social scientist to expect tribals to remain in their villages in loin cloths, some of the interpretations of 'development' are unreasonable to the other extreme, though pushed on by the juggernaut of a vote based polity and a bureaucracy that is hardly Weberian. No doubt health, education and other attributes of modern society are essential for all and there has to be respect for the aspirations of people, but there is also much that is pleasant and nostalgic in the older ways of life. However, people cannot survive on tales of tradition only and work opportunities have to be created, though it certainly does not mean that Bhujia hill has to be dug up in the process or a brick kiln has to be set next to the royal cenotaphs at Bhuj, the perpetrators of such acts hardly being needy. The populace that is worse off is more content. It has been heartening to watch, over a period of time, the village artisans expanding their operations not only to metropolitan cities of the country, but to London, Munich, Tokyo and Moscow. Not surprisingly, with the revival of the arts and crafts of Kachchh a greater inflow of income is not limited to basic necessities and there has been a resurgence of traditional values, since the daily attire of, say, a Rabari woman with all her jewelry costs more than an evening dress of an urban socialite! The photographs are a visual record of Kachchh as it delightfully exists today, but might change differently tomorrow. It has been interesting being associated with this region during its process of change, times good and bad, including one of its worst droughts, and capturing its images. For now it is adieu to Kachchh.

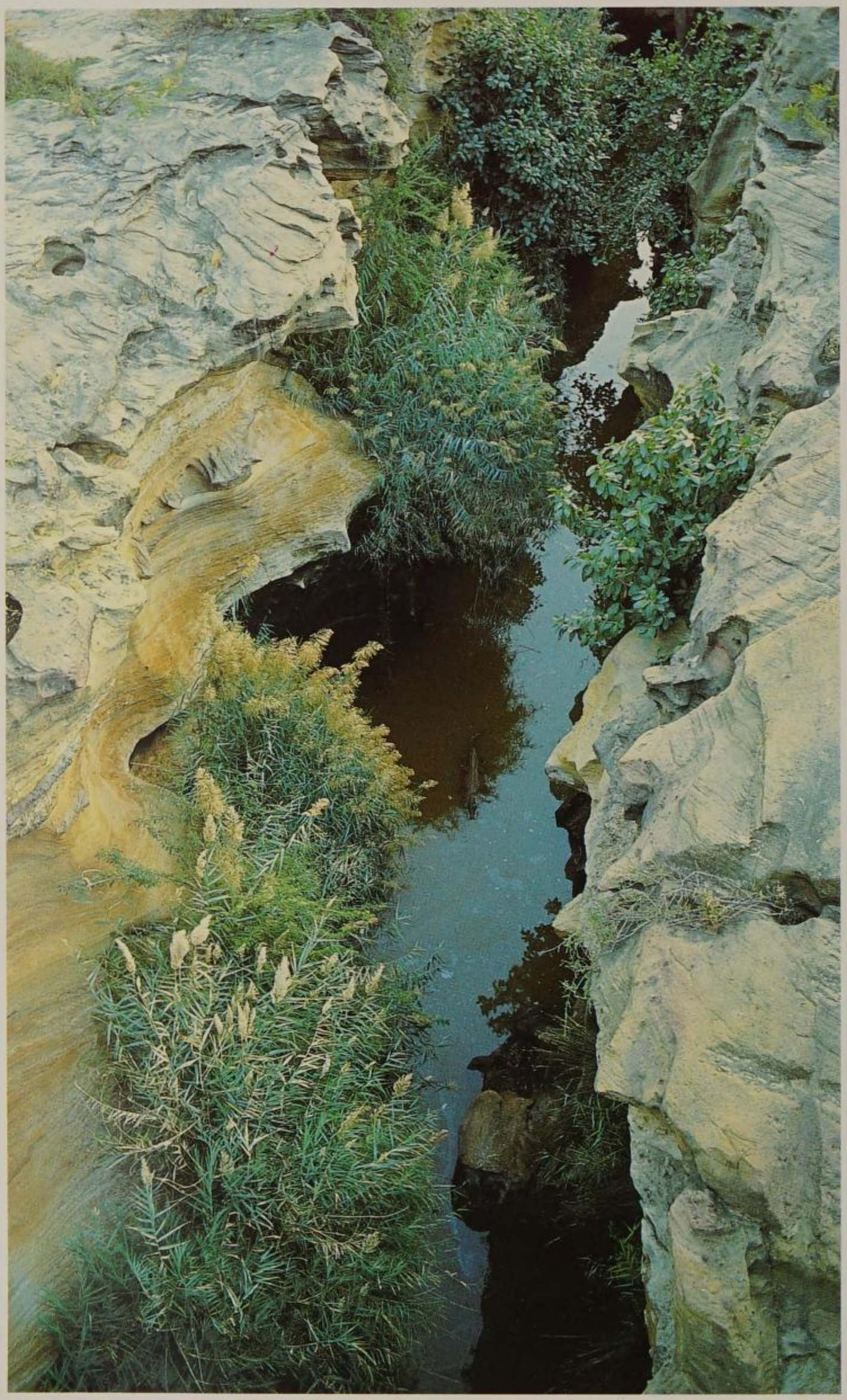
Date trees near Bhuj. In the not too distant past the acquifers of Kachchh were not so depleted.

HISTORY

The earliest historic notices of Kachchh are by the Greeks, starting with the reign of Alexander, 325 B.C.. This region passed into Menander's kingdom, 142-124 B.C. After the Graeco-Bacterian empire was overthrown, Kachchh was with the Scythians and, later, the Parthians. In 246 A.D., the author of Periplus referred to the present Rann of Kachchh as the gulf of Eirinon, implying that at that period Kachchh was surrounded by the sea. Kachchh soon passed through to the Kathis, Chavdas and the Solankis. Arab pressure on Sindh around the ninth century displaced a section of the Samma Rajputs from there to Kachchh and its modern history starts from then on. It was the duo Mod and Manai, sons of a Samma chief of Sindh who, with great deceit, took possession of the kingdom of their uncle Vagham Chavda in Kachchh. From there on to Guntri and right up to Kanthkot in the east was easy for them. Their successors, including the famous Lakho Phulani, continued to consolidate their rule through the tenth century. Punvro, one of the successors gathered an evil reputation and was said to have been demolished by the legendary Jakhs. It was also the end of the first phase of Samma rule in Kachchh and they could come back to power only one and a half centuries later, with the coming to power of Lakha Jadeja. He was the son of Jada and the clan name Jadeja is derived from him.

The second phase of Samma rule was characterised by clan warfare and interspersed with attacks from outside adventurers. In 1472 the powerful Sultan Muhammad Begada made the Kachchhis submit. The ruling family continued to fragment and become weak until the rise of

A mangrove island near Mundra. The creeks in the Gulf of Kachchh snake around many such mangrove swamps, which are nature's way of reclaiming land from the sea.



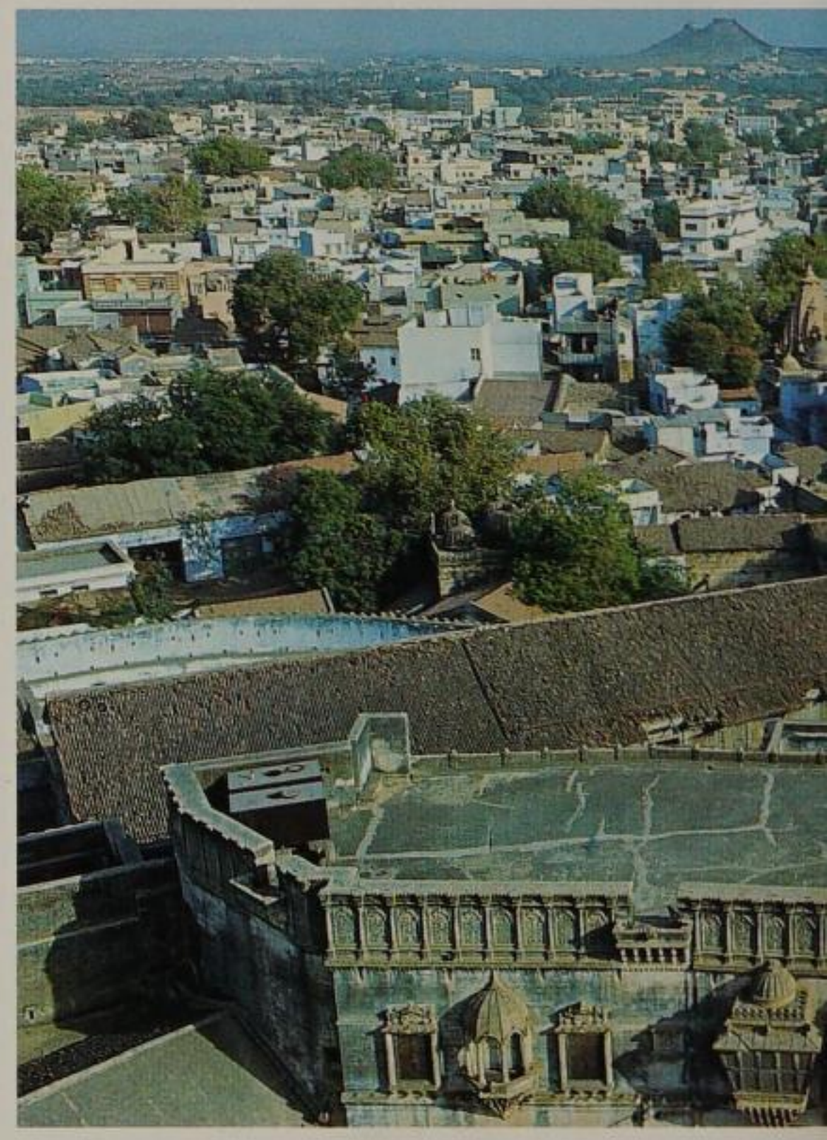
Khengarji, son of Jam Hamirji. He came into notice when, at the age of fourteen, he saved the Sultan of Ahmedabad from an attacking lion.

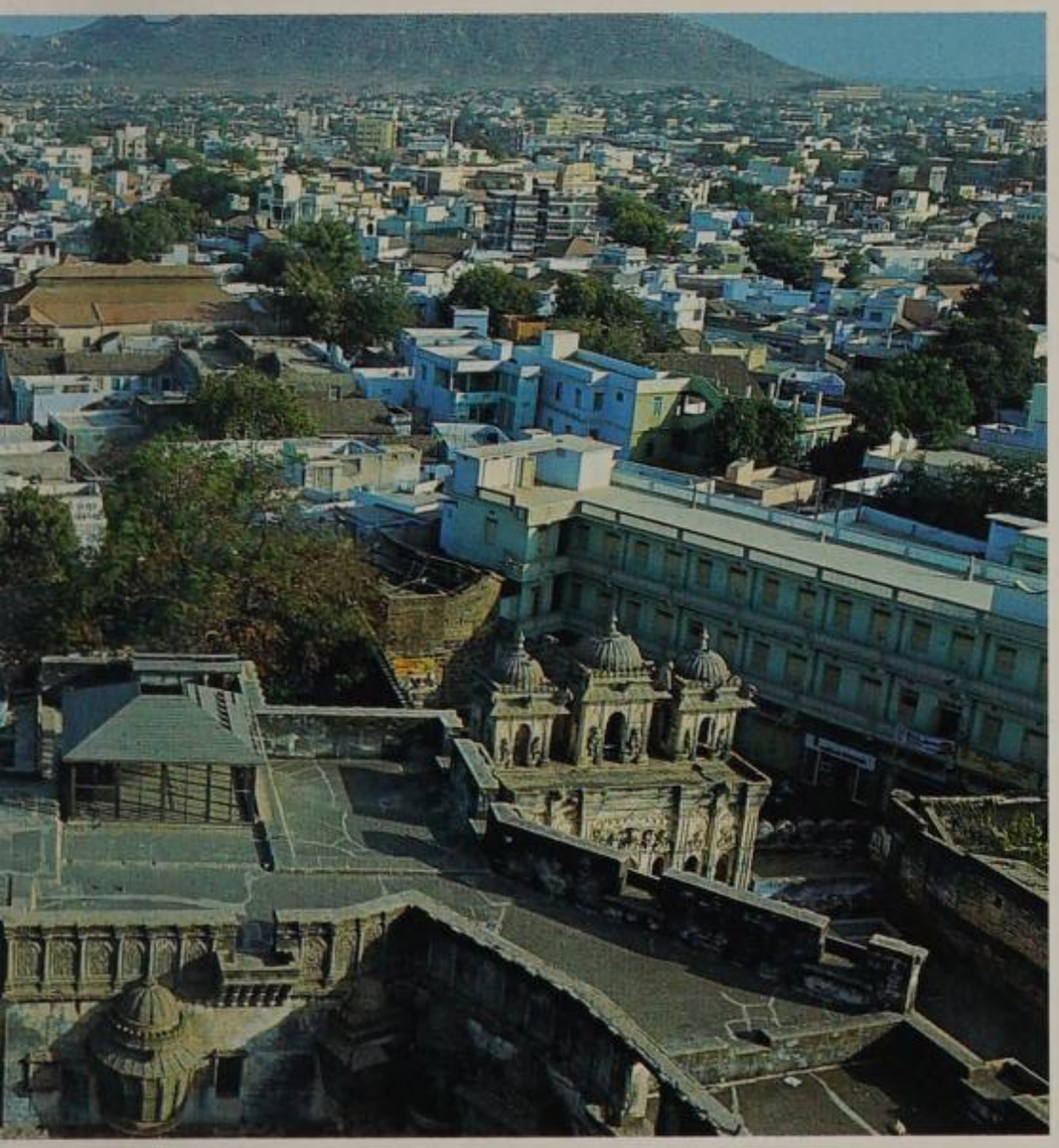
Impressed with Khengarji, the Sultan granted his tactical request for the fiefdom of Morvi. It was Khengarji's first step in regaining Kachchh from Jams Dedaji and Raval. From Morvi, Khengarji constantly attacked areas in Kachchh. Ultimately he succeeded in driving them out and became the monarch of Kachchh (1548-1585). Khengarji first established his seat of governance at Rapar and then moved to Anjar and, later, Bhuj. Jam Raval fled to Kathiawar and founded the independent kingdom of Nawanagar, present day Jamnagar. Rao Khengar is considered the real founder of the fortunes of the ruling house of Kachchh. At Bhuj he also set up the institution of Moti Poshal, a place of learning for the royal family, with Guruji Manekmarji as its head. In due course of time "Guruji" became distorted to "Gurji" as his descendants are still called. The spear of Khengarji was kept in the custody of Guruji, who had originally given it to him with his blessings while Khengarji was still a fugitive, on his way to Ahmedabad. However, when Khengarji tried to interfere in Sindh affairs he received a severe setback and was defeated at the first battle of Jhara. This had been precipitated by Khengarji trying to help Jam Firoz, a fugitive from the ruling house of Sindh.

Khengarji was succeeded in 1586 by Bharmal I, who ruled till 1631. Soon after, Kachchh, along with the Ahmedabad kings, passed on to the Mughal emperors. The Ain-i-Akbari (1583-1590) speaks well of Kachchh during this period. In 1617 Bharmal called on Emperor Jahangir at Ahmedabad and presented him with "... a hundred Kachchh horses and hundred gold *ashrafis.*" Jahangir was favourably impressed and "much pleased with the old chief, gave him his own horse, a pair of elephants, a sword with diamond mounted hilt and four rings." At the same time, on the condition of giving pilgrims free passage to

Opposite page: A rocky gorge of the Khari river with a resident crocodile. Above: A brilliant splash of sunflowers at a wadi, *irrigated farm.*

Above and right: Bhuj, with Bhujia hill in the background.





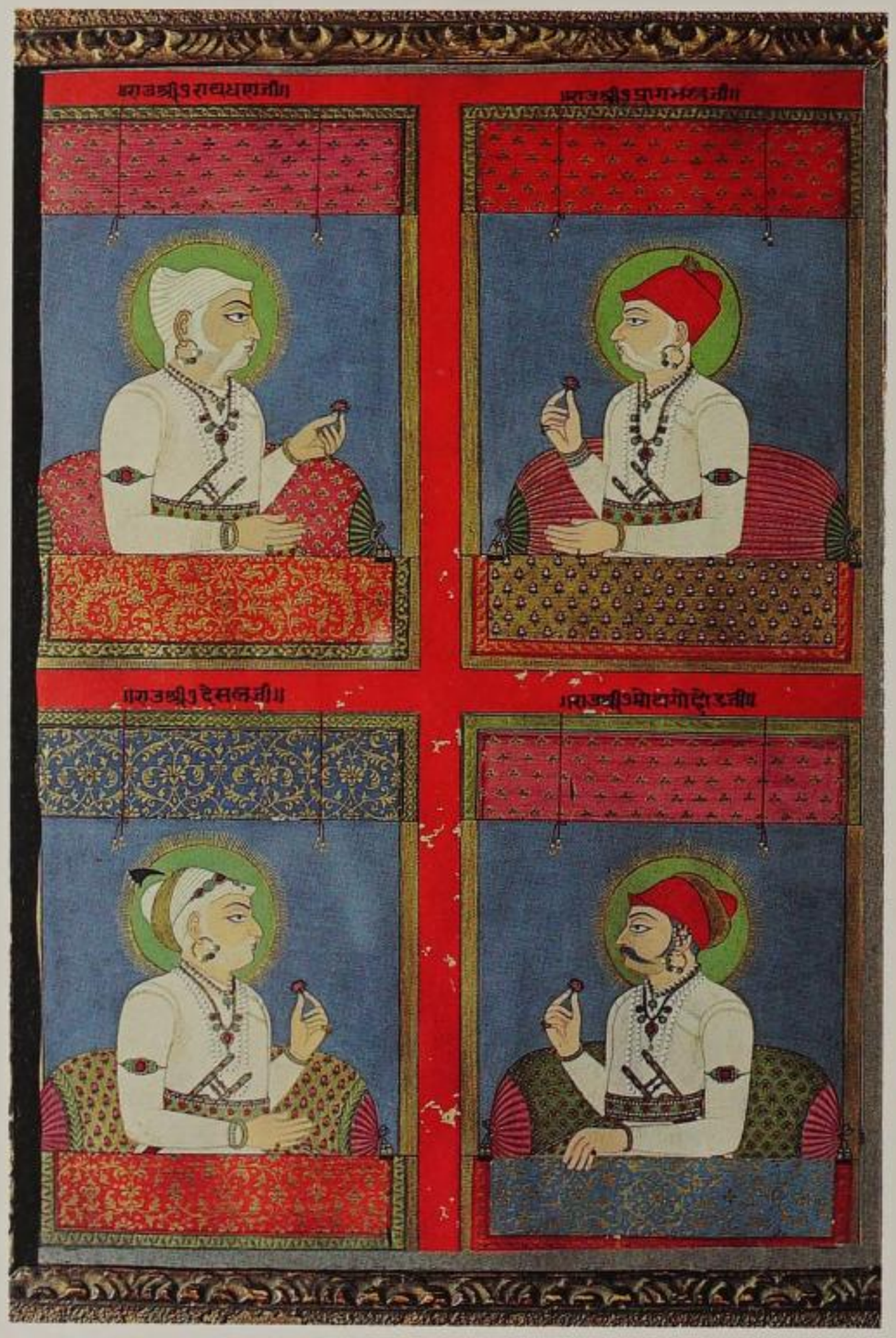
Mecca, he freed Kachchh from tribute. The naval power of Kachchh had impressed Jahangir and he wanted to make use of it. As another favour he also permitted the striking of independent coinage, the *Kori* of Kachchh.

After Bharmal were Rao Bhojraj (1631-1645), Rao Khengar II (1645-1654), Rao Tamachi (1654-1662) and Rao Rayadhan I (1662-1698). In 1659, the unfortunate Mughal prince Dara, a fugitive from Aurangzeb, had arrived in Kachchh. Tamachi at first received him kindly but afterwards forced him to leave Kachchh. Another important event of that time was the arrival of the saint Murad Shah from Bokhara, Central Asia. When the powerful Viceroy of Ahmedabad, Muazzim Beg, made an attempt to plunder Kachchh (contrary to the 1617 agreement with the Mughal emperor Jahangir) it was Murad Shah who persuaded him to call off his expedition, thus saving Kachchh from what would have been a great defeat. Murad Shah now lies buried in Mundra where a beautifully carved *dargah* was erected in his honour. He is also the patron saint of Kachchhi seafarers.

After the death of Rao Rayadhan I in 1698 there followed the first case of disputed succession, that of Rao Pragmal. It broke up the unity of allegiance which, since the day of Khengar I, had kept the *bhayyad*, Jadeja brotherhood, and great landholders loyal to the Rao as the head of state. Rao Pragmal seized power by force but after this initial setback he had a successful reign. He even crowned himself Maharao after he successfully helped in the restoration of Jam Tamachi to the throne of Nawanagar (Jamnagar). Jam Tamachi had been unseated by a rival faction and Rao Pragmalji helped him by sending a strong force to Nawanagar under the command of his son, Prince Godji.

Rao Godji I (1715-1718) managed to consolidate the territories of Kachchh, even though he had a short spell. He was succeeded by Rao Desal I (1718-1741). Kachchh prospered under his rule. The Mughal overlords also watched this and, inspite of their earlier agreement, eyed Kachchh as a potential source for more funds. Two exploratory attempts were made by them. Rao Desal, to guard against possible attack, built the fort at Bhuj, a wise move. The Mughal Viceroy, Sarbuland Khan (1723-1730), accompanied by Kanyoji, the Morvi chief, made a powerful attempt to sack Bhuj but could not succeed. Desalji then also fortified the towns of Anjar, Mundra and Rapar. He even made excursions to Parkar and established a fort, Kachchhigad, in Okhamandal, to check piracy. With the help of wise ministers like Devkaran Seth, Desalji increased the prosperity of Kachchh. Unfortunately, Desalji's last years were sad as his only son Lakhaji turned against him and some nobles fanned the ill-feelings between the father and the young chief.

Rao Lakha (1741-1760) had a comfortable reign though his son Godji, stirred on by his mother and an ex-minister, Punja Seth, demanded an early share in the management of the estate. Rao Lakha utilised the bursting treasure he had inherited and made his court lavish. The Rao nonetheless scored a coup when Emperor Alamgir II (1754-1759) conferred on him the title of "Mirza Maharao," and the honoured insignia of the "Mahi Maratib." A matrimonial link with the ruling house of Jodhpur was also established. He was also a patron of the arts and possessed some vision about the need for industrial training in Kachchh. One of the lasting works of this period is the Aina Mahal, which was designed and constructed by his protege, Ramsinh. Taken into the service of the Rao, "He established a canon foundry and silk and glass manufactures, made clocks, and minutely copied patterns of European models and figures. So well did he teach that the mechanical skill for which Kachchh craftsmen are now famous is generally traced to his training" (Campbell). Ramsinh is also responsible for the old palace at Mandvi, which clearly reflects his earlier training in Holland. Ramsinh too remained faithful to his master and after his



Clockwise from top left: Raos Raydhanji, Pragmalji I, Godji, and Desalji I.

The court of Rao Deshalji II.

Top: The minor Prithvirajji and members of his governing council. Above: Rao Pragmalji with his courtiers, in an early photograph of that period of Kachchh.

death raised a splendid memorial to him, with elaborate columns, arches and dancing girls sculpted onto the capitals. "No Maharani followed him to his pyre; but fifteen of the dancing girls, whose protector and patron he had been, sacrificed themselves as *satis,* and thus established his claim to the noble dome which surmounts his cenotaph" (Rushbrook Williams). Rao Lakha also established the Vrajbhasha Pathshala, a school for poets. He was able to get the services of Kanak Kushalji from Marwar to teach in this institution. Lakhpatji himself was a good poet. His poetic works in Vrajbhasha and Kachchhi are still preserved in the Aina Mahal. However, the end of his reign was soured by bankruptcy. He sacked ministers one after another and even attacked their personal properties. The Lohana community was bitterly persecuted by him. Sixty-four of the chief families were tortured to death and money extorted from them. In 1778 the head of the caste, Devchand, was put to death and since then no Lohana would rise to the post of minister. "Rao Lakhpatji had become extremely weakened by constant debauchery. The affairs of the Government were entrusted to a succession of incapable ministers" (Campbell).

On coming to power, Rao Godji II (1760-1778) ignored the claims of his former mentor, Punja Seth, for being appointed minister. The wily Punja made his way to Sindh, to the court of Ghulam Shah Kalhora, and masterminded one of the greatest treacheries in Kachchh history. He led the Shah to Kachchh where the two forces engaged in the fierce battle of Jhara (1762) wherein nearly a hundred thousand Kachchhis were slain. The defeat remains a humiliating scar in the memory of Kachchh and many villages have remains of memorial stones honouring those who went to Jhara to fight for the Rao and gave their lives. Much bardic lore is attached to how Punja was made to call off Ghulam Shah by the queen-mother sending a white hair in a silver box, to entreat him and remind him of

their association. The Rao rehabilitated Punja but did not forgive him. Later, when he had repaired his forts, raised a militia and established his power, he ordered Punja to be seized and confined in irons for ten days. Finally, with his own hands he presented him with a cup of poison. Realising that he had been tricked, Ghulam Shah attacked Kachchh again but called off the expedition on receiving in marriage a princess from the Rao's house. While retreating he constructed a great earthen embankment on the Indus to cut off its waters to the northern areas of Kachchh. It was a diabolical act, "a refinement in persecution known only to Asiatics" (Burnes). However, till his end Godji remained an insecure man and surrounded himself with Sidi bodyguards, Negro Muslims of Abyssinian origin. When he died at the age of forty-four, he left behind an empty treasury.

In the various power struggles the *dewans*, prime ministers, of the rulers of Kachchh often had a difficult time due to the wealth they gathered. Sometimes generations of their families were wiped out. Maharao Godji, in his desperation to get more revenue, sacked twenty *dewans* one after another, murdering some of them and confiscating their fortunes. He knew that this policy would not be opposed by the nobility or the people as the *dewans* "were despised by the nobles and hated by the masses. Thus their fall excited no protest; while at the same time, the opportunities which ministerial office presented for amassing a fortune sufficed to ensure an unfailing supply of candidates" (Rushbrook Williams).

Rao Rayadhan II (1778-1786) succeeded Godji at the early age of fifteen and was guided by Sidi Merich – the oppressive governor of Bhuj. "There were scenes of bloodshed and unmanly violence which the pen recoils from recording and the mind from contemplating" (Raikes). Around 1785, he began to show signs of insanity and was placed under restraint. The state was

An aristocratic Jadeja *lady from Tera in a painting in the* Kamangari *tradition of Kachchh.*

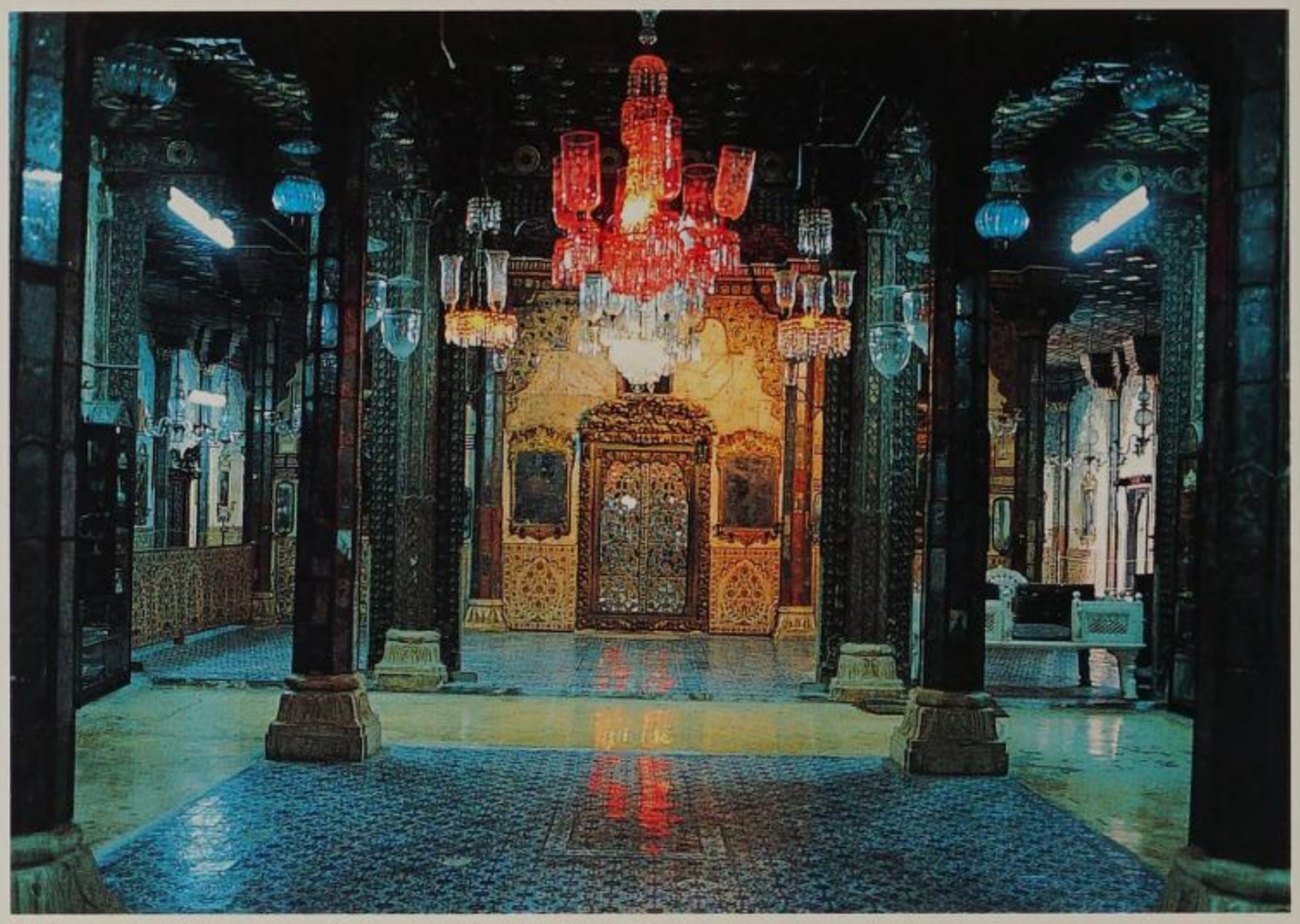
Above: Maharao Khengarji III with his sons Yuvraj Vijaysinhji (sitting, right) and Manubha (sitting, left). Standing are Jam Ranjitsinhji of Jamnagar (right) and Dadubha of Tera.
Top and middle: Sections of scroll paintings of the annual, Nag Panchmi, royal procession to the Bhujia Serpent Temple.

governed by a council headed by his younger brother, Prithviraj, the minor Bhaiji Bava (1786-1801).

Burnes, surgeon to the Residency at Bhuj, has left an interesting account of this crucial time in the history of Kachchh. There were spells of anarchy during this period resulting in the arrival of the British. In the annals of this time a name that is prominent is that of Jamadar Fateh Muhammad. In these troubled times, according to Burnes, Fateh Muhammad was, "... hailed as a deliverer, who restored the province to tranquility, by a firm and judicious exercise of authority." Fateh Muhammad, also known as the "Kutchi Cromwell," was a man of great courage, tact and patience. Though illiterate, he rose to become the *dewan* of Prithvirajji, in whose minority the administration was run by a council of twelve (Baar Bhaiya). During his tenure Kachchh recovered from its misrule and began to flourish once again.

In time Bhaiji Bava eased out Fateh Muhammad, who returned for a second term, a changed man due to the ungratefulness of the populace. Order failed, piracy increased, bandits and plunderers ruled. The mismanagement of the state led to the British moving in and the signing of the Treaty of 1809. Political and administrative powers were given to the Resident, Captain MacMurdo.

On the death of Rao Rayadhan, there were two contenders for the throne – Ladhubha, the lawful heir, son of Bhaiji Bava, who was backed by some provincial Jadeja chiefs and Mansinh, the son of the Rao by a slave girl. Ibrahim Miyan, Fateh Muhammad's son, had developed an attachment with Mansinh's sister, Kessar Bai. When the liaison was exposed, Fateh Muhammad's conduct, on this occasion, "... evinced the superiority of his character. A connection with the family of the Rao, now easily within his reach, would have added much to his personal respectability and might have been a sure means of continuing his power to his descendants; but instead he



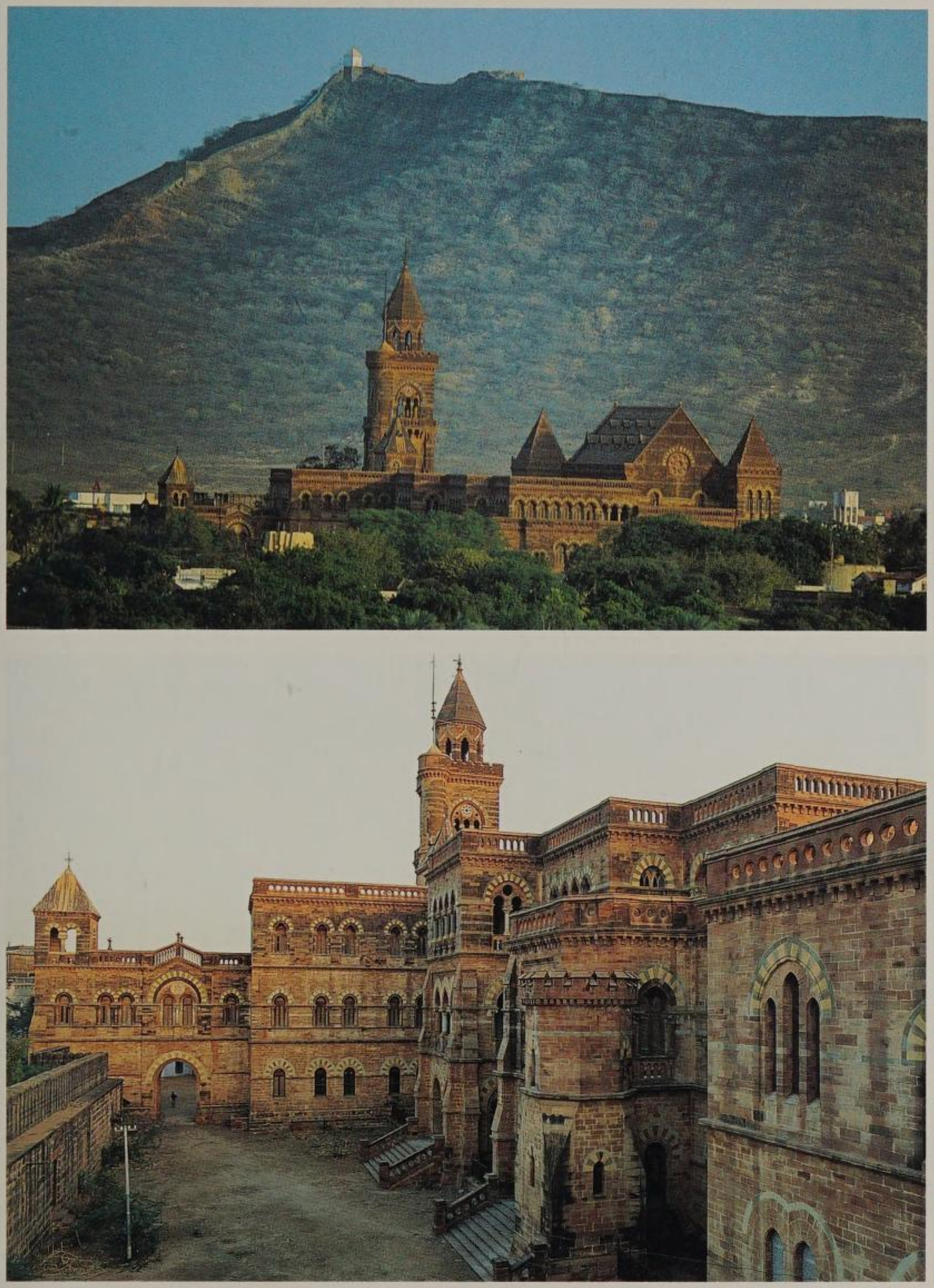
Malam Sinh's hall of mirrors at Aina Mahal, Bhuj.

forbade his son's further visits at the *darbar,* and forced him to leave the capital and remain at Wagur" (Burnes).

After Fateh Muhammad died, Ibrahim Miyan returned to Bhuj and successfully lobbied for Mansinh who was elevated to the throne as Rao Bharra or Bharmalji. But the earlier scandal haunted him and those who had exposed him earlier resented his reinstatement. He was stabbed and killed at an open *darbar.* This also made his brother, Husain Miyan, fearful for the rest of his life. It was a sad end to a great man's family and Fateh Muhammad himself died in poverty. In a postscript dated 15 June 1829, Burnes writes, "Husain Miyan still lingers out a disreputable existence. He pays an annual visit to Bhuj, the scene of his father's greatness and his own dishonour; while his gross and bloated appearance denotes the nature of his pursuits. His daughter, whose person Rao Bharmalji violated, has sunk to the lowest state of prostitution."

Fateh Muhammad lies in a tomb outside the walled city of Bhuj, along with his sons Ibrahim Miyan, and Hussain Miyan, and his daughter. The site is looked after by the Devasthan Committee of the Collector's office and on Dussehra a small fair is held for children and sweets are distributed.

Meanwhile, Bharmalji had created an unenviable reputation for himself and even made plans to assassinate Captain Mac-Murdo. Bhuj became a crime-ridden city where, "women of all classes were publicly seized in the streets, to be dragged to the palace, and there despoiled of their ornaments and their virtue. No man possessed of any wealth was safe in the country." Bharmalji, subsequently, went on to kill Ladhubha and ultimately lost his throne because of related events which followed. However, even after his formal deposition, the Jadeja chiefs selected the three-year-old son of Bharmalji and not the infant son of the murdered Prince Ladhubha. "The selection of the Jharajah Bhayad proved in the end more fortunate than if it had fallen on the weakly child of Ladhubha, (whom, however, they declared the next heir to Dessuljee, in the event of his not living to have an issue) as he died a few weeks after.



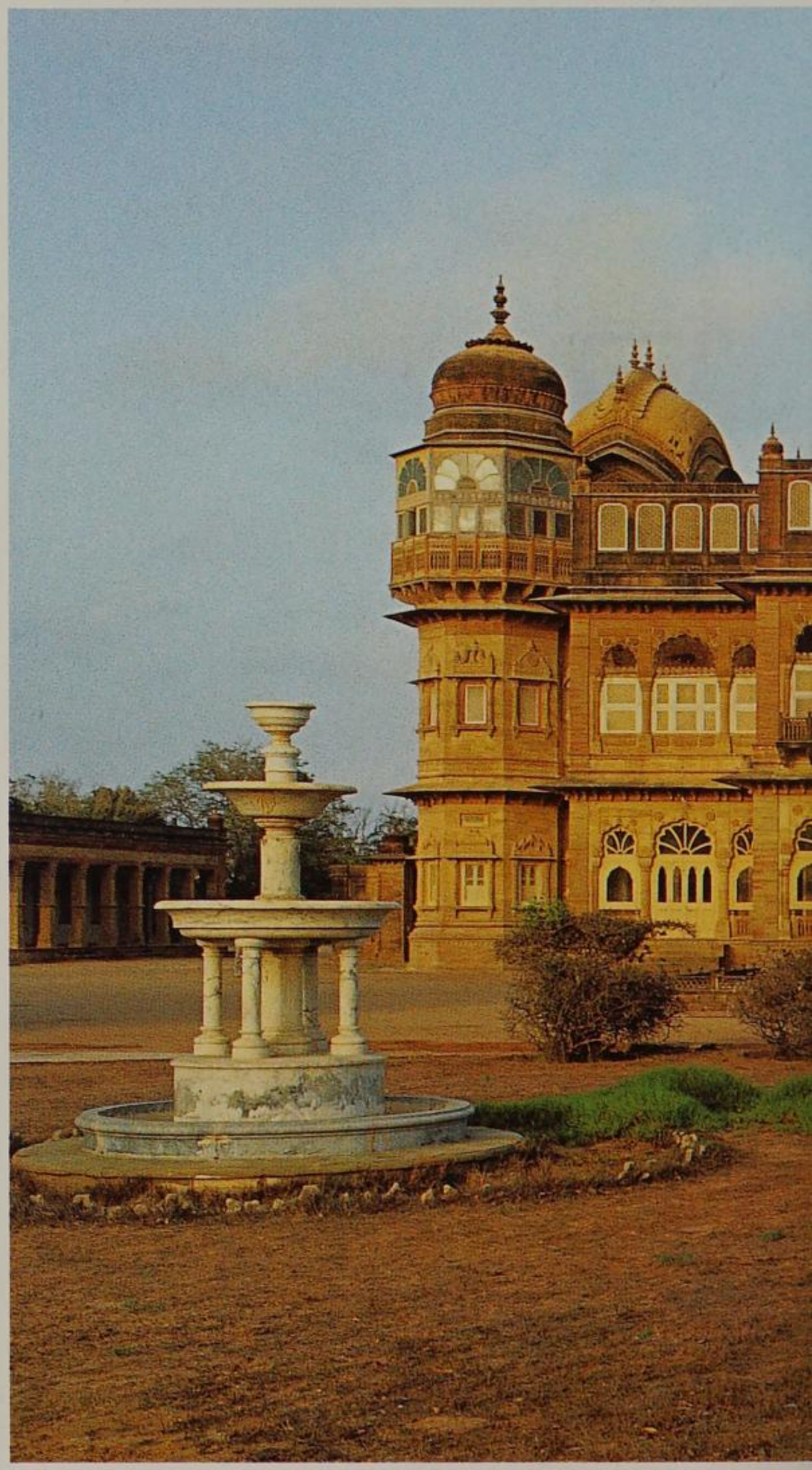
Above: Pragmahal, an elegant Italianate palace, with (top) the Serpent Temple in the background.

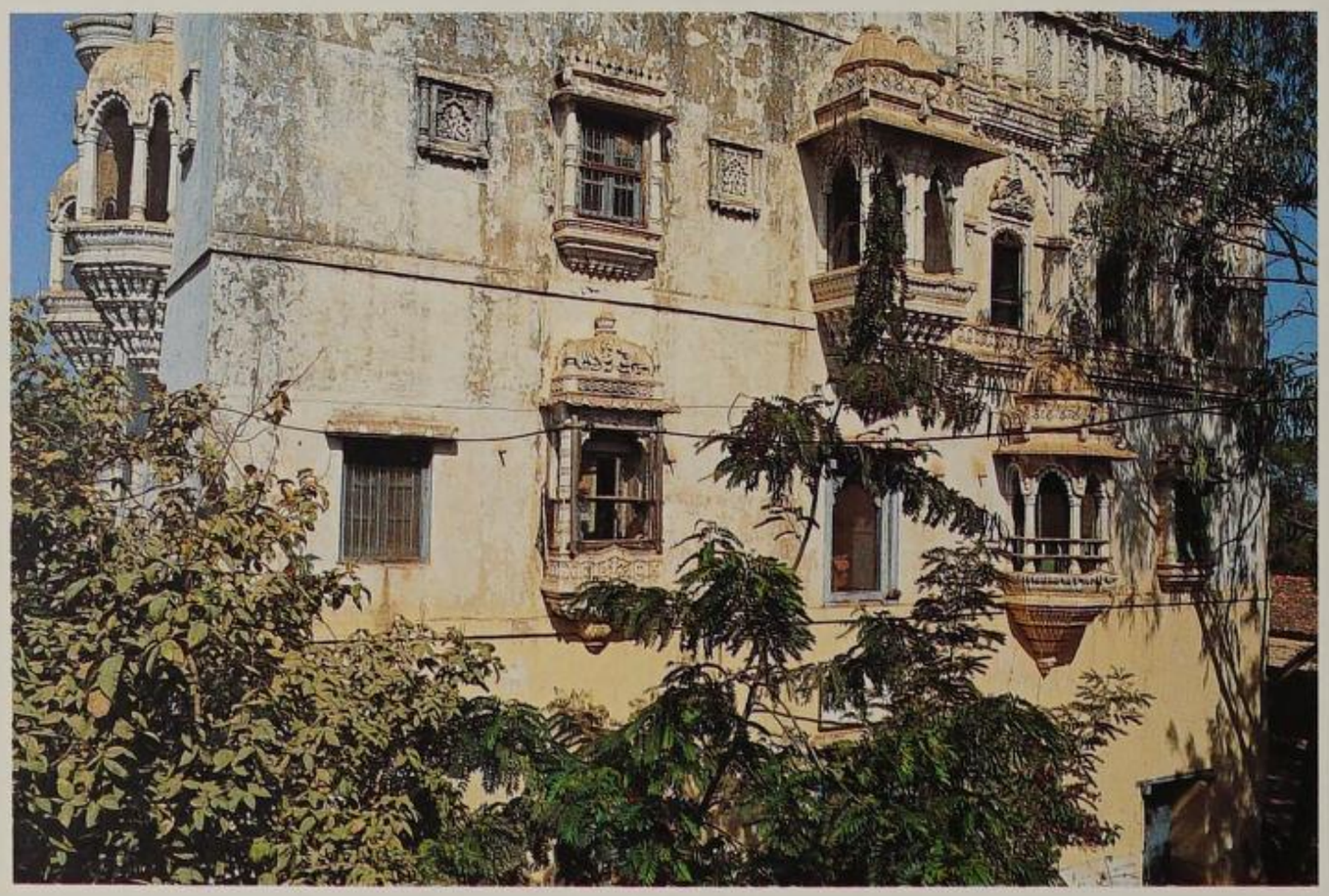
Thus the race of Bhaiji Bava, the legitimate branch of the royal family of Kutch, became extinct" (Burnes).

After the death of Fateh Muhammad in 1813 disorder continued in Kachchh and in 1815 Captain MacMurdo's own camp was attacked by bandits. This was the proverbial last straw and after futile discussions with Rao Bharmal II, the British advanced into Kachchh and in December 1815, Anjar was taken. The British forces moved forward and on 14 January 1816, the second treaty was signed. However, Rao Bharmal II (1814-1819) continued his depredations and picked quarrels with the *bhayyad*. On 24 March 1819, a British force, accompanied by the leading Jadeja chiefs and the Resident, encamped before the fort at Bhuj. The Rao was informed that the Treaty of 1816 was suspended and the next day the fort was taken ever. The 1819 treaty was concluded in October and its main provisions were the deposition of Rao Bharmal and the management of the government by a Regency under the British Resident; that Kachchh would support a force of the East India Company based there; no foreign soldiers would be maintained by Kachchh; the British Government would guarantee the Jadeja chiefs their possessions; the Rao and his heirs would submit disputes to its arbitration; Kachchh ports would be open to all British vessels; and that the Rao and the chiefs should engage to prevent, *sati*, female infanticide.

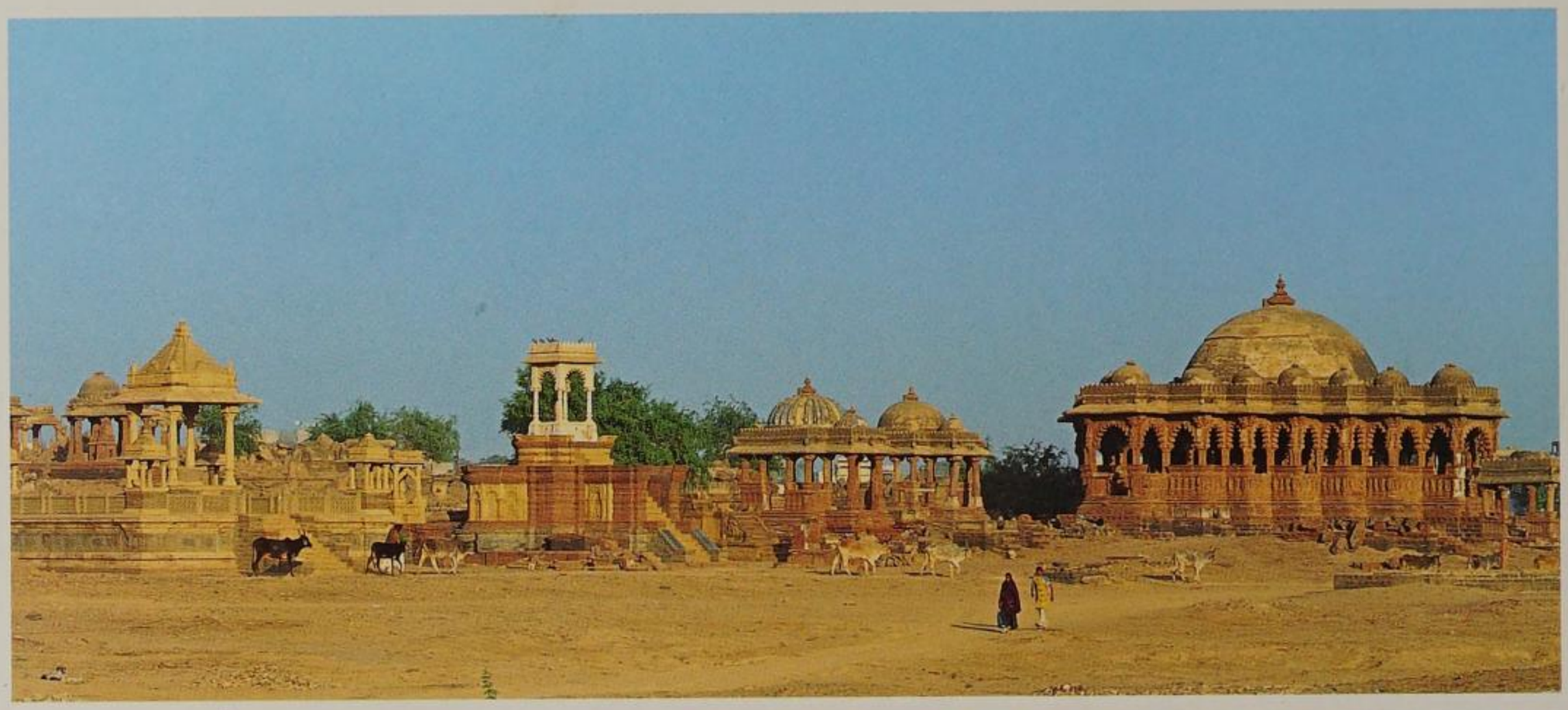
Captain MacMurdo, later to become the British Collector and Resident at Bhuj, played an important role in those years. He presided over the Regency Council during the infancy of the new Rao. His short and eventful career came to an end on 28 April 1820, at the age of thirty-five only, and he is buried at Varnu, near Adesar, on the edge of the Little Rann. The epitaph says that he died of cholera but local legend at Varnu says that he died because he defied the deity Varnu by camping in front of its temple and sleeping on a cot.

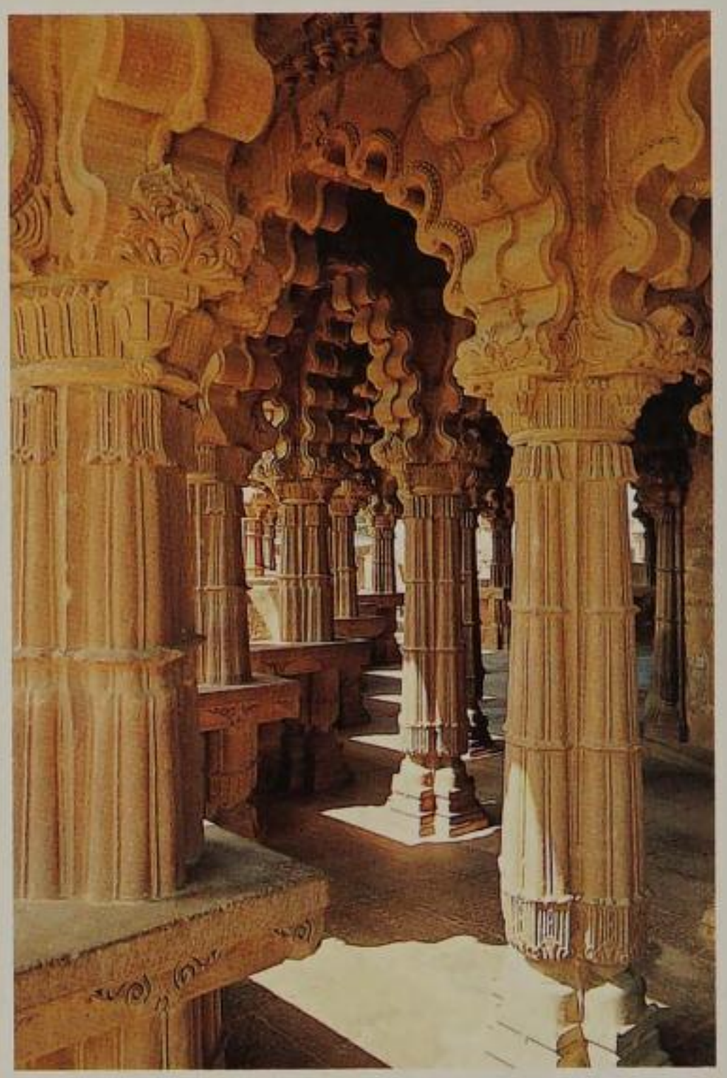
During his tenure, Captain MacMurdo's



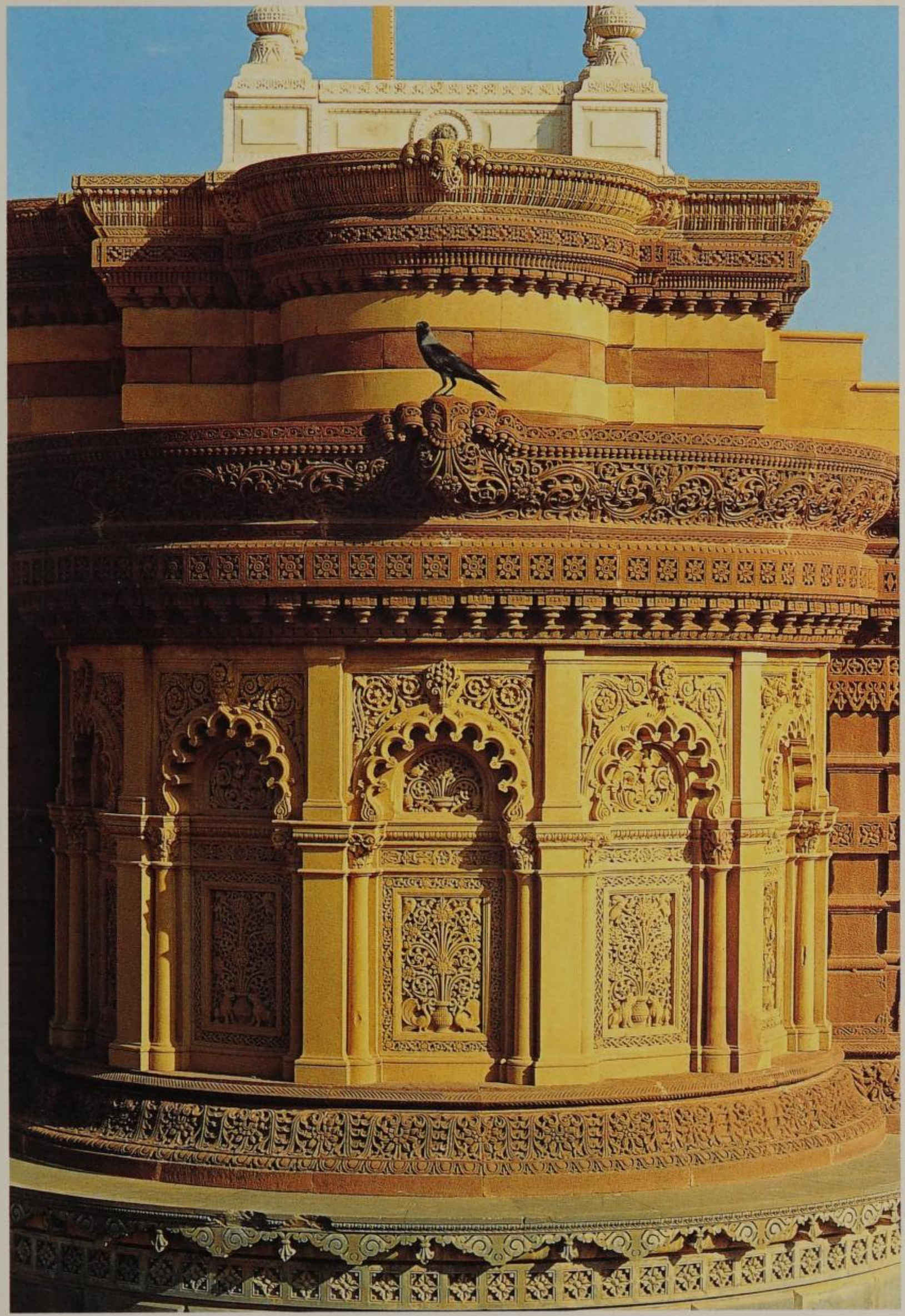


Top left and above: The old palace and the more recent Vijay Vilas palace, Mandvi. Left: Jamadar Fateh Mohammed's palace at Bhuj.



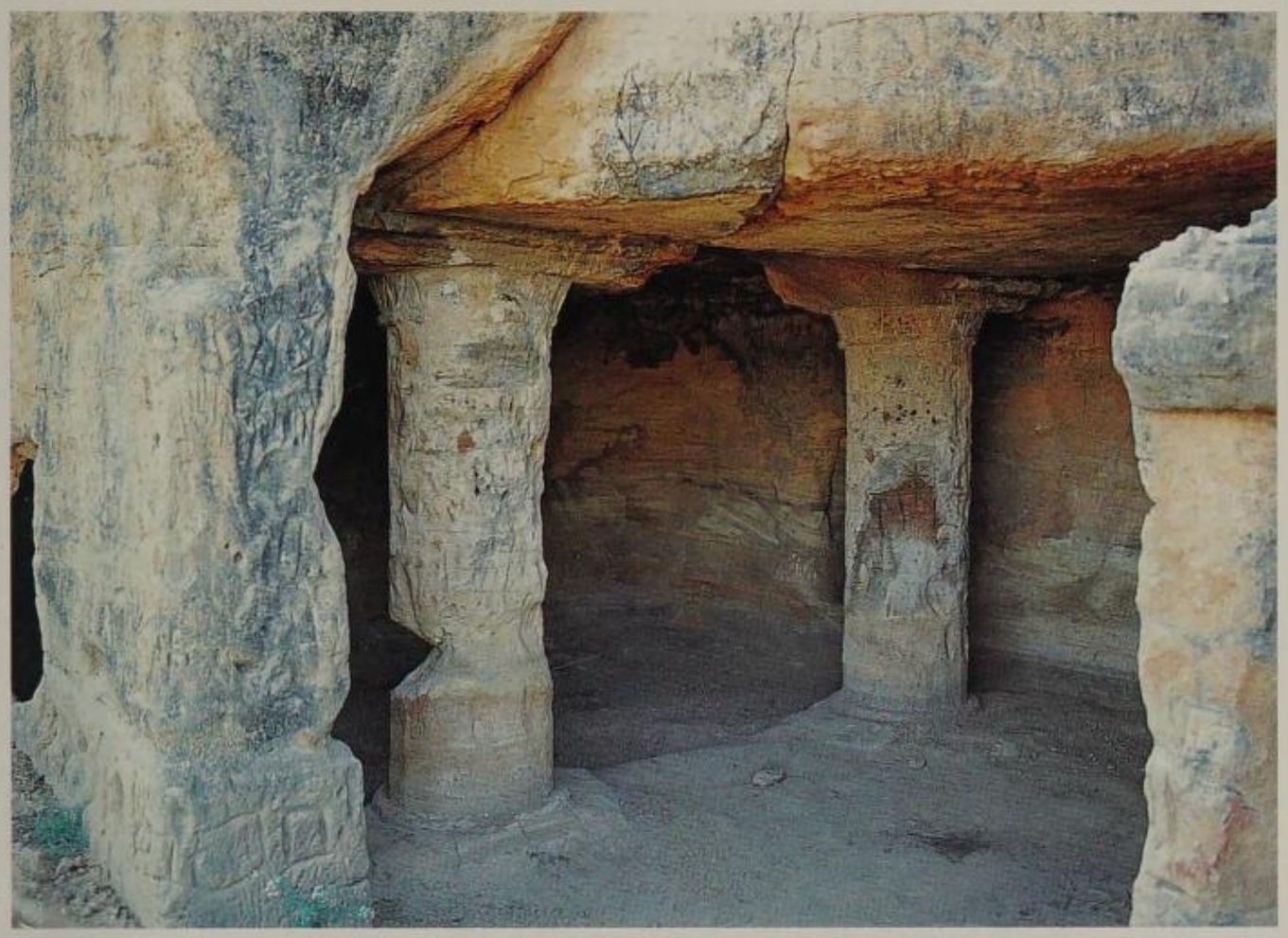


Top: The royal cenotaphs, chattris, *at Hamirsar lake in the centre of Bhuj. Above left and above: Details from Rao Lakhaji's* chatri, *built by his protege Malam Sinh. Right: Detail from Pragmalji's* chatri.

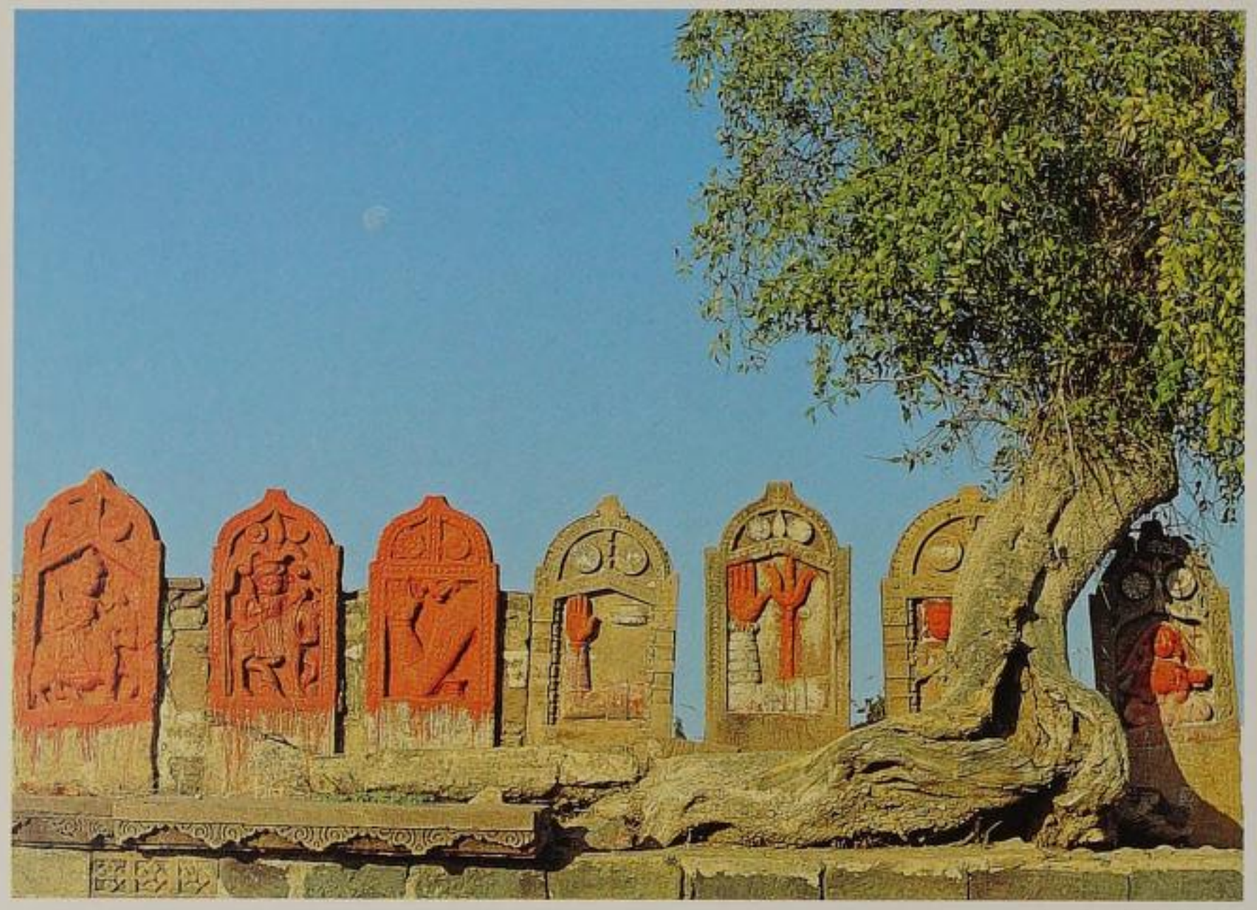


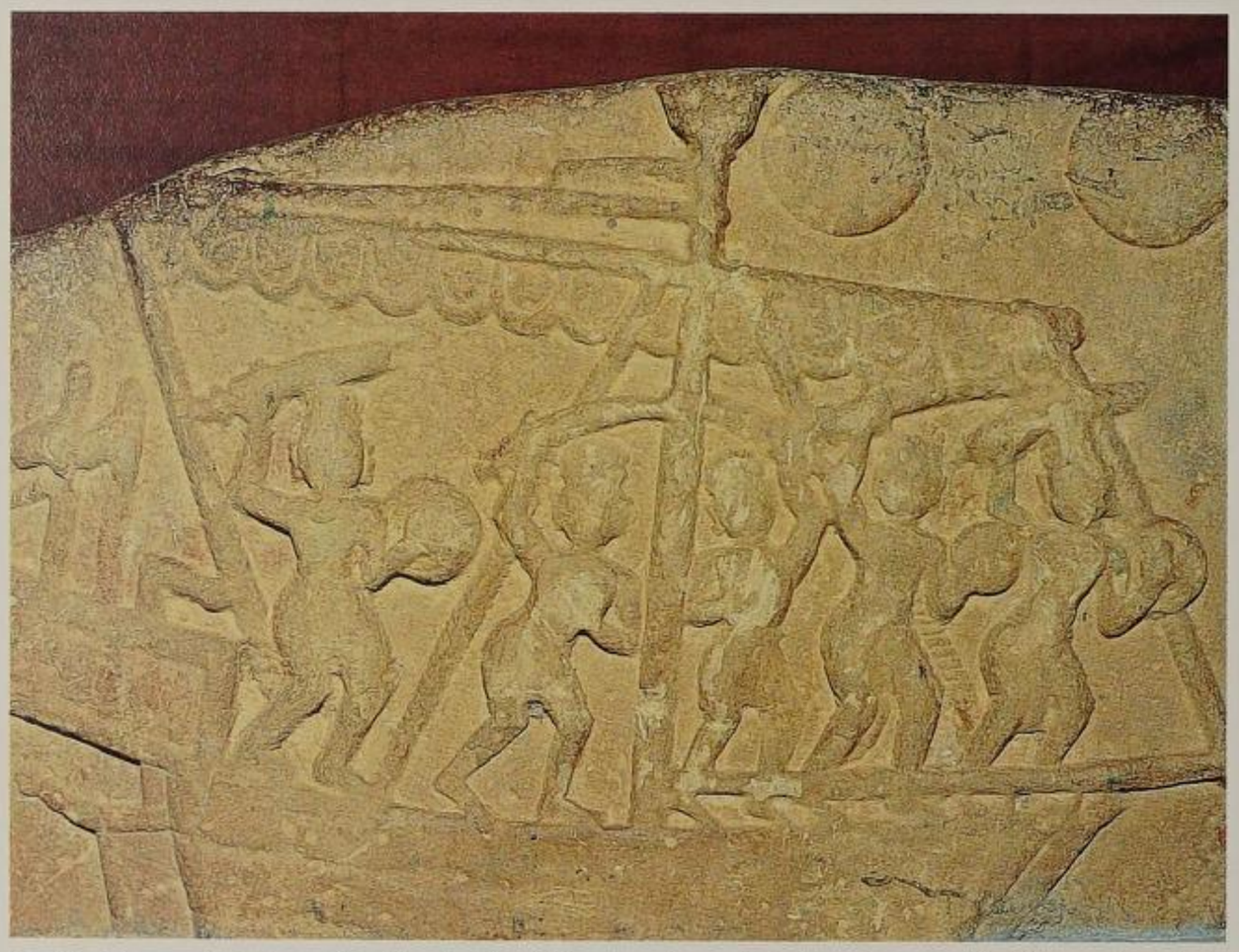
Top: The Harrappan site near Dholavira in Kachchh. Middle: One of the many seals (one inch square in size) found in the excavations. Above: Oldest Kshatrapa inscription (89 A.D.) from the Saka era, in Brahmi script, found in Kachchh at Andhau.

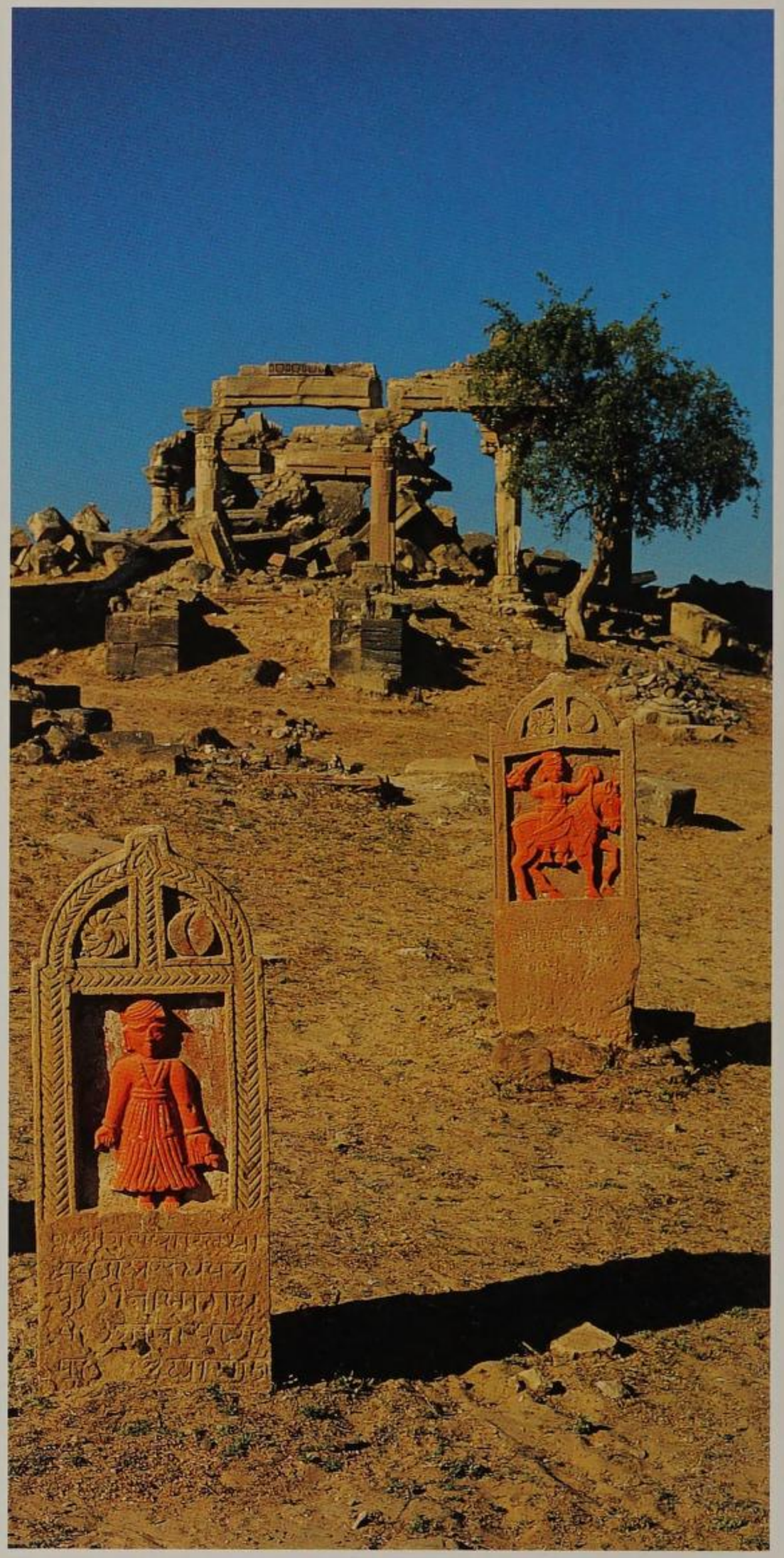
A thirteenth century image of Vihnu, from Bhadreshwar.



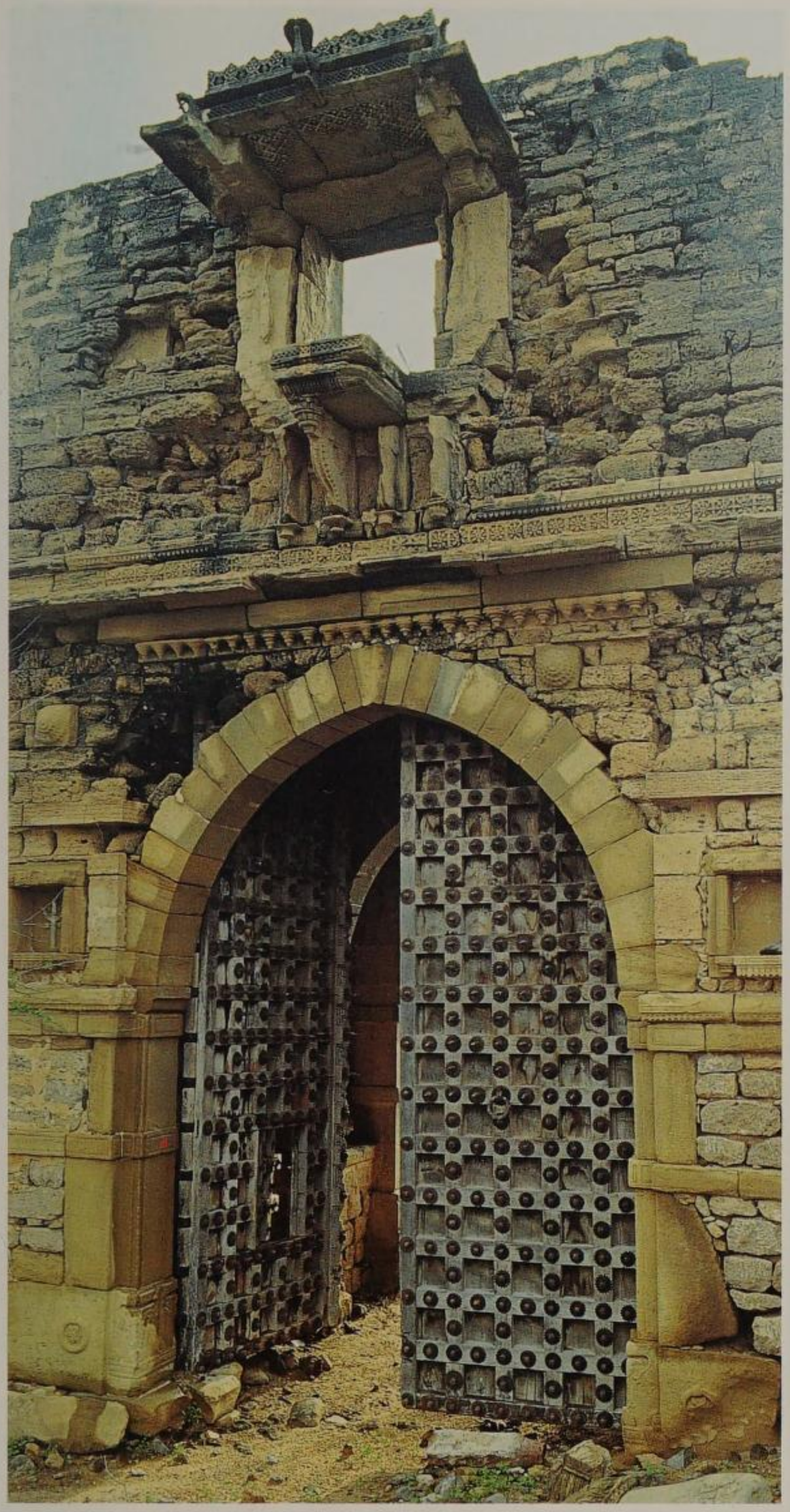
Left above: Buddhist caves at Siyot, with ten feet high columns. Left: Drawings inside the cave. Above: From inside the cave many such rare Buddhist seals were recovered.







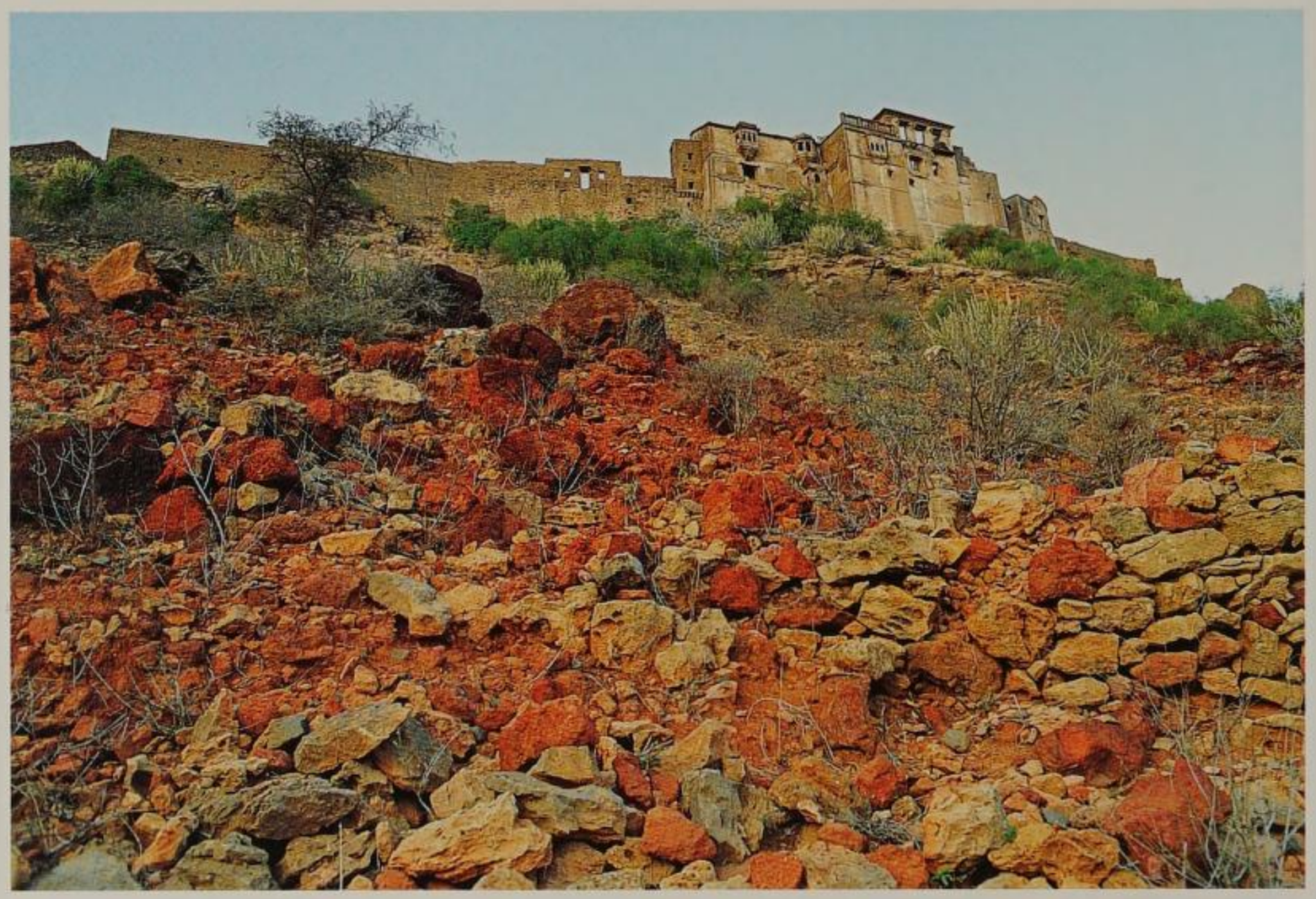
Right: Memorial stones (palias). Top: The hand symbol denotes a sati. Above: A unique memorial stone of a shipwreck.



Above: Shiv temple at Kera near Bhuj. Left: Gajod fort.

Kachchhi contemporaries gave him a rough time due to which, perhaps, he made adverse remarks in his writings, though he found a lot to recommend the womenfolk. He observed that, "The Jadejas are a most ignorant and indolent race. They possess neither the activity, the spirit, the sense of honour nor the jealousy of feudal rights and privileges that were so remarkable in their ancestors and which are still not extinguished in the opposite peninsula of Kathiawar. The Jadeja men are fond of spirituous liquors and indulge morning, noon, and night, so that they may be said to be constantly under the influence of spirits. While the master of the family is thus careless and lost to everything that is honourable and respectable, his wives are active, jealous, and intriguing. The women of the Rajpoots are much distinguished from those of any other caste of Hindoos. They are high-spirited, bold, and enterprising, and are justly celebrated for a remarkable neatness of person, and anxiety about personal appearance. The people are generally speaking wretchedly poor in the circumstances and abominably debauched in their morals. Murders, of the most atrocious description, have been frequent and not looked upon with any degree of horror. Poison is generally employed; but sometimes the sword is resorted to and the deed openly done. No stain is attached to a traitor or villain. Attempts have been made by sons upon the lives of their fathers. Husbands, sons and relations suffer indiscriminately from the jealousy of many wives. In every diabolical and bold act the women took the lead."

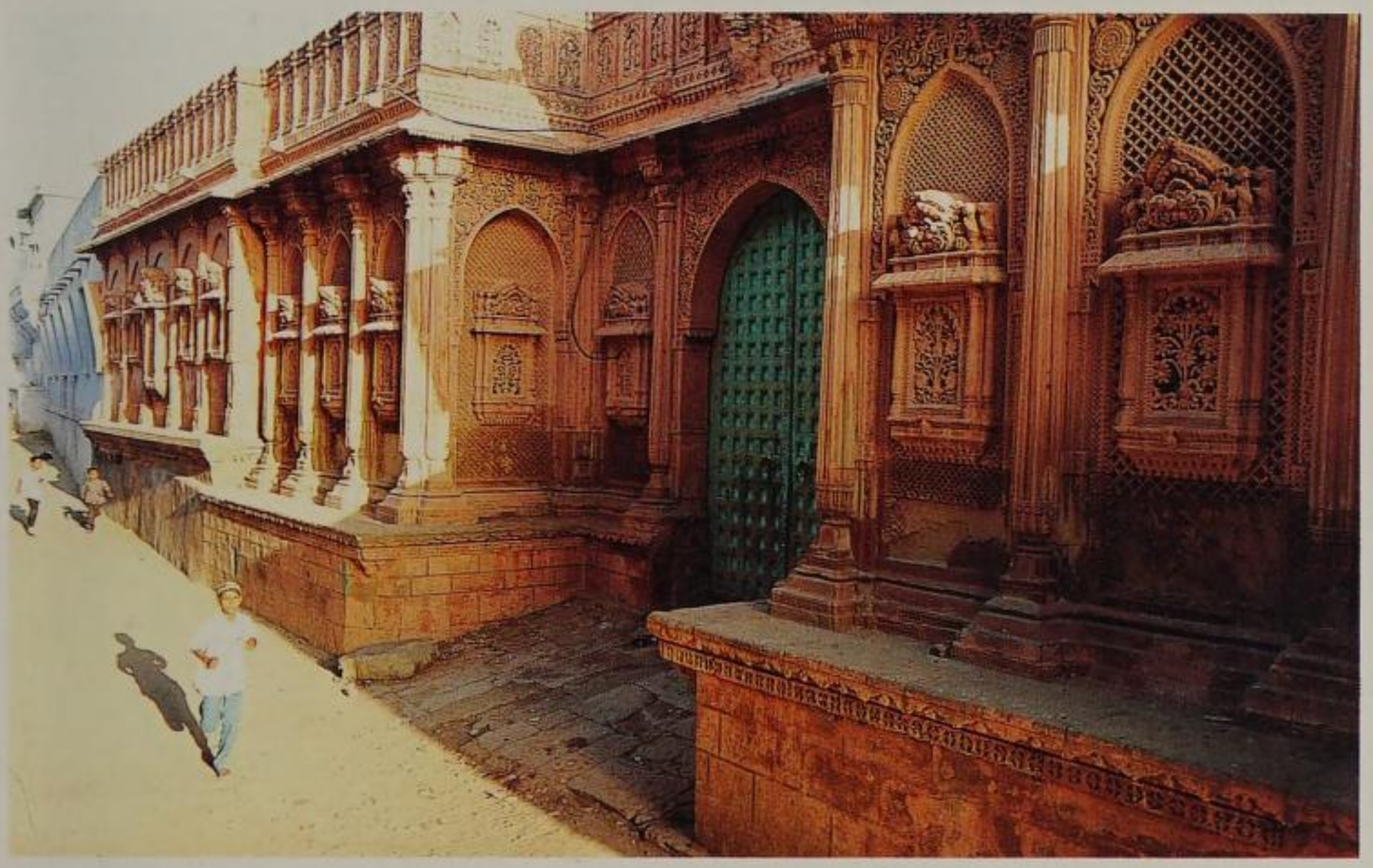
Such remarks were commonly read out in papers in Bombay and they painted a bleak picture of Kachchh, thus hastening the Treaty of 1819. What is surprising is that the Treaty of 1819 favoured the Jadejas to the detriment of the powers of the Rao. Of the 850 Kachchh villages, 434 were held by Jadeja chiefs, 122 were endowments to religious charities and only 294 were *durbar* villages. Lacking any contribution

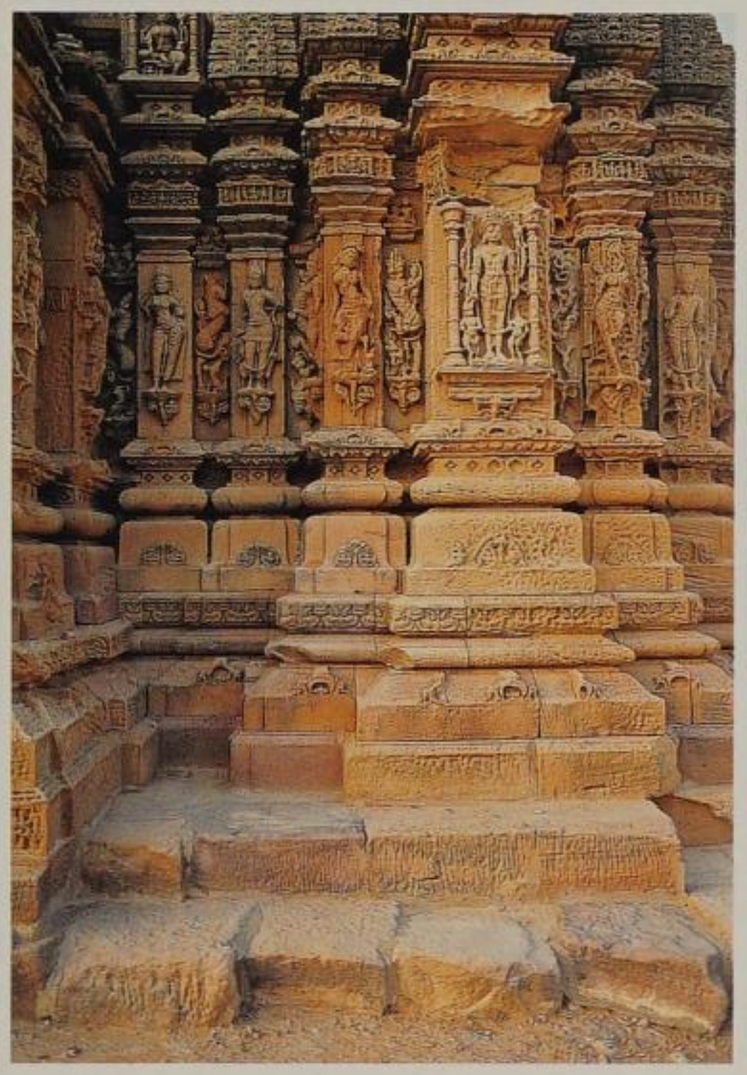


Top: The quaint fort at Roha. Above: Ramkund, Bhuj.

The deserted city within the Roha fort.

Punvro-no-gadh, ruins of the capital of Punvro.



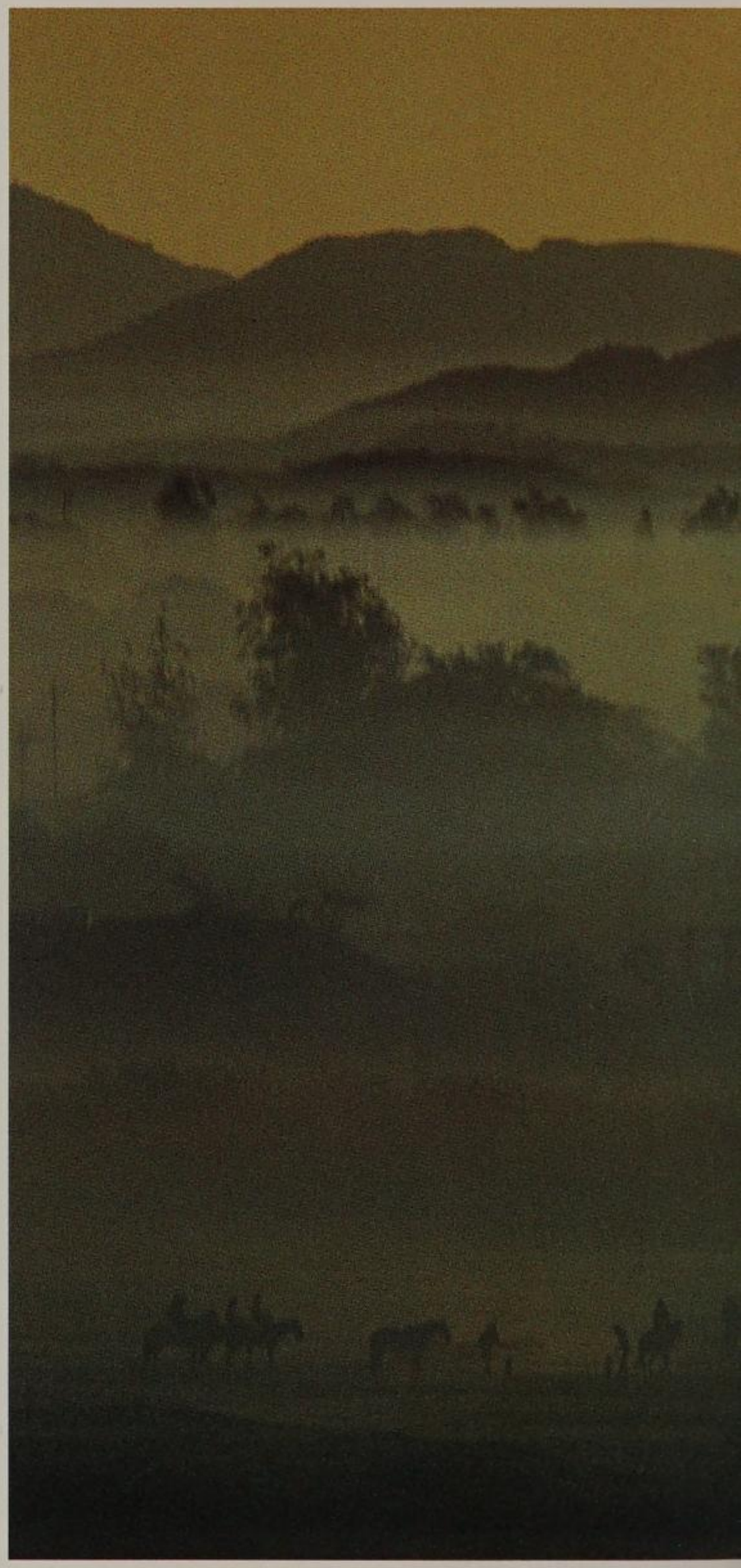


Left above: The ruins of the Sun Temple at Kotai, Lakho Phulani's city, on the edge of the Banni. Above: Detail from the temple. Left: Dargah of the Saint Murad Shah of Bokhara, Mundra. He came to Kachchh from Central Asia and is venerated by all religions.

from the Jadeja villages, the entire burden of the governance of Kachchh fell on these 294 villages only. The Jadejas were also given some civil and judicial powers. For war services they furnished men, but only on payment. The reason, perhaps, for the British strategy was that they knew Bharmalji would not readily submit as MacMurdo must have reported. On the other hand, the Rao's sour relations with his *bhayyad* were exploited by the British who promised guarantees to them in the treaties to keep them out of the *durbar's* jurisdiction. This avoided a lengthy, more expensive and difficult military campaign, the British having to cross the Little Rann and tidal marshes. The Jadejas had led the British to the gates of Bhuj, perhaps a singular such occurrence in their history in India. However, they ultimately continued to regret the state of affairs, along with the rulers. The subsequent Raos spent their lifetimes trying to consolidate their powers and Pragmalji addressed in 1869 a long, printed, memorial to the Secretary of State for India in Council. He eventually succeeded in getting some concessions in the Bhayyad Agreement of 1875.

On coming of age, Rao Desal II was installed on 8 July 1834. He ruled prosperously till 1860 and started a campaign to curb the practices of female infanticide, slave trade and *sati*. Marriane Postans, a traveller who visited Kachchh in the mid-nineteenth century, mentioned that, "The inhabitants are a busy, cheerful, and industrious race, and their peculiarly bright and varied costumes gave an appearance of gaiety to the place, which is strikingly pleasing... The population is principally composed of Banyas, Brahmins and cultivators; many of whom may be seen on the outside of the town, either engaged in their several callings, loitering lazily along, or grouped together in little knots, gossiping with vehement gesticulation, on any trifling subject, of profit or pleasures. Here and there, a retainer of the Rao comes swaggering along, displaying the superior height, acquiline nose, and long moustache of the Rajput tribe; on his arms are a sword, shield, and matchlock and his dress and bearing are marked by an air of mingled haughtiness, and independence. Nearby a water carrier urges on his bullock, which laden with the water bags, slowly saunters forward, whilst his master smokes his hookah, and indulges in a passing chat with the women, who, gracefully bearing their earthen water-vessels on their heads, are returning to the well to which he journeys. Lastly, are groups of women, employed in sifting grain from light baskets, in which they display the most graceful attitudes; the passing breeze winnows the corn, as it falls into large heaps, and numerous asses wait leisurely around, to carry it in sacks to merchants' granaries."

She has also left an account of Rao Desalji's harem. "His Highness the Rao of Kachchh has five wives, who reside in a wing of the palace, separated from the main building by several courtyards and passages. The avenue immediately leading to the women's apartments is guarded at its entrance by a pair of most hideous eunuchs, who sit cross legged, in a sort of basket chair placed on each side of the portal. These sooty guardians of female virtue are armed to the teeth, and in addition to that, have a huge blunderbuss lying by each seat. Having passed these retainers of marital tyranny, we enter the large court, filled on the occasion of my visit to the ladies, by about three hundred women of the city, of various castes and degrees, who had come to gratify two of the strongest desires of the female mind, curiosity and gossip. After passing up an avenue, formed by a double file of these dark beauties and being greeted by whisperings and gigglings, I entered the sitting apartment of the Ranees. The Rao's mother, who resides in a separate palace came to her son's harem on the occasion of my visit and received me with great ease. Taking my hand, she expressed her pleasure at seeing me, and then placing me in a chair next to her own, conversed agreeably on a variety of subjects, in excellent Hindustanee. She is a

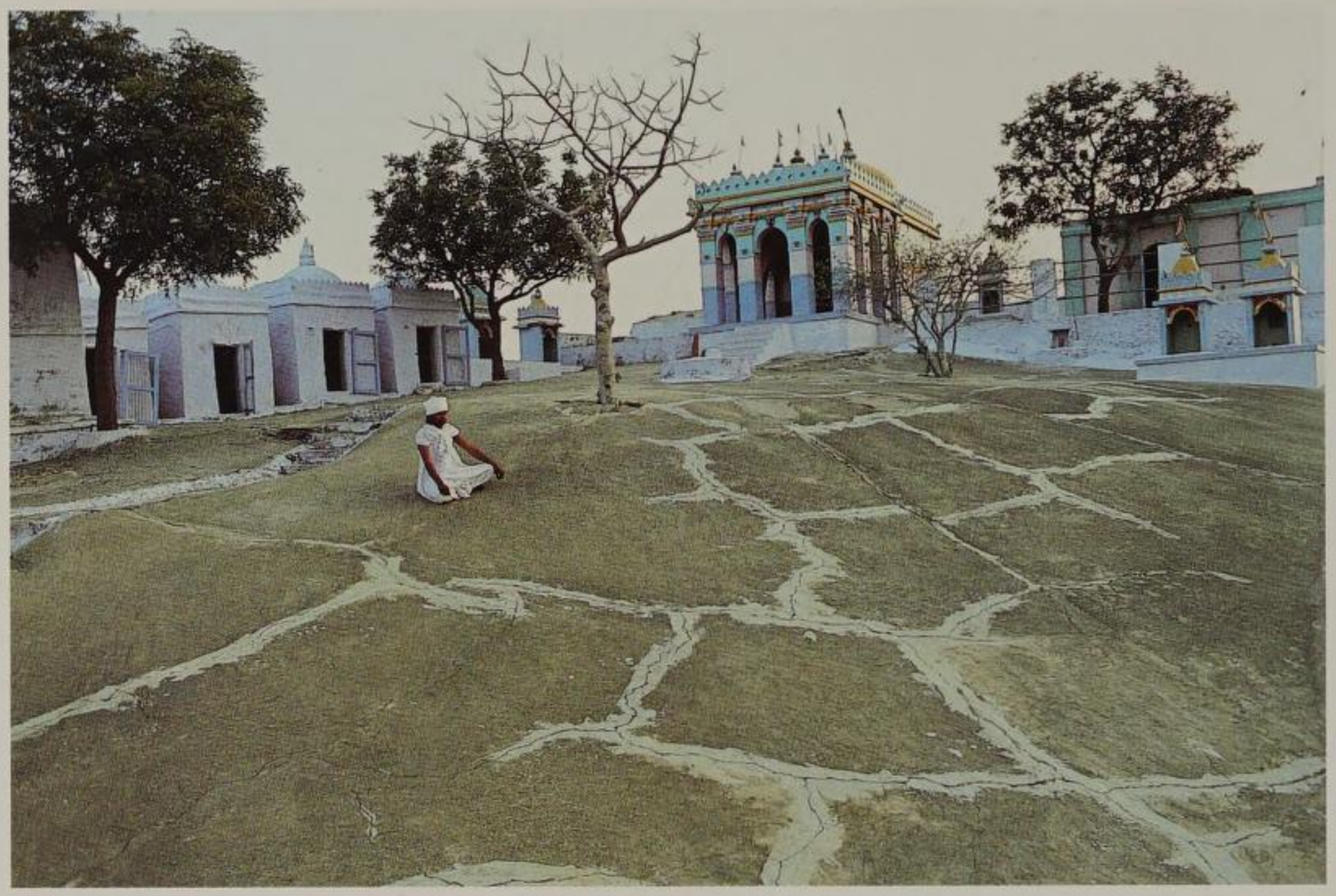


Suralbit temple on the outskirts of Bhuj.

very lovely woman and does not appear older than about five and thirty; she has a very fair complexion, fine figure, and lustrous black eyes, not possessing the languid sleepy softness, which generally characterises the native eye, but large, bright, and expressive. She is the daughter of a chief of Sodahs, a tribe who inhabit the great desert of Thurr, and are remarkable for the surpassing beauty of their women. The fathers of these belles calculate their amount of property according to their 'heads of daughters', being happy to dispose of them as brides to the highest bidder." Postans also describes a ghastly *sati* which neither the Rao nor the British Resident could prevent.

Trade during the nineteenth century was also thriving and the main Kachchhi ports were Mandvi, Mundra, Jakhau, Koteshwar, Lakhphat and the smaller landing places at Tuna and Jangi. The Kachchhis traded with Karachi, Kathiawar, Malabar and with some of the Arab and African ports. The land trade was across the Rann to Sindh and Parkar. One route lay in the west from Nara in Kachchh to Luna at the west end of the Banni, and from there north to Rahim-ki-Bazaar. The other was further east from Sumrasar in Kachchh, north across the middle of the Banni along the west of Pachcham to Baliari in Thar. A third route lay north from the island of Bela to Nagar. The traffic was almost entirely by camels.

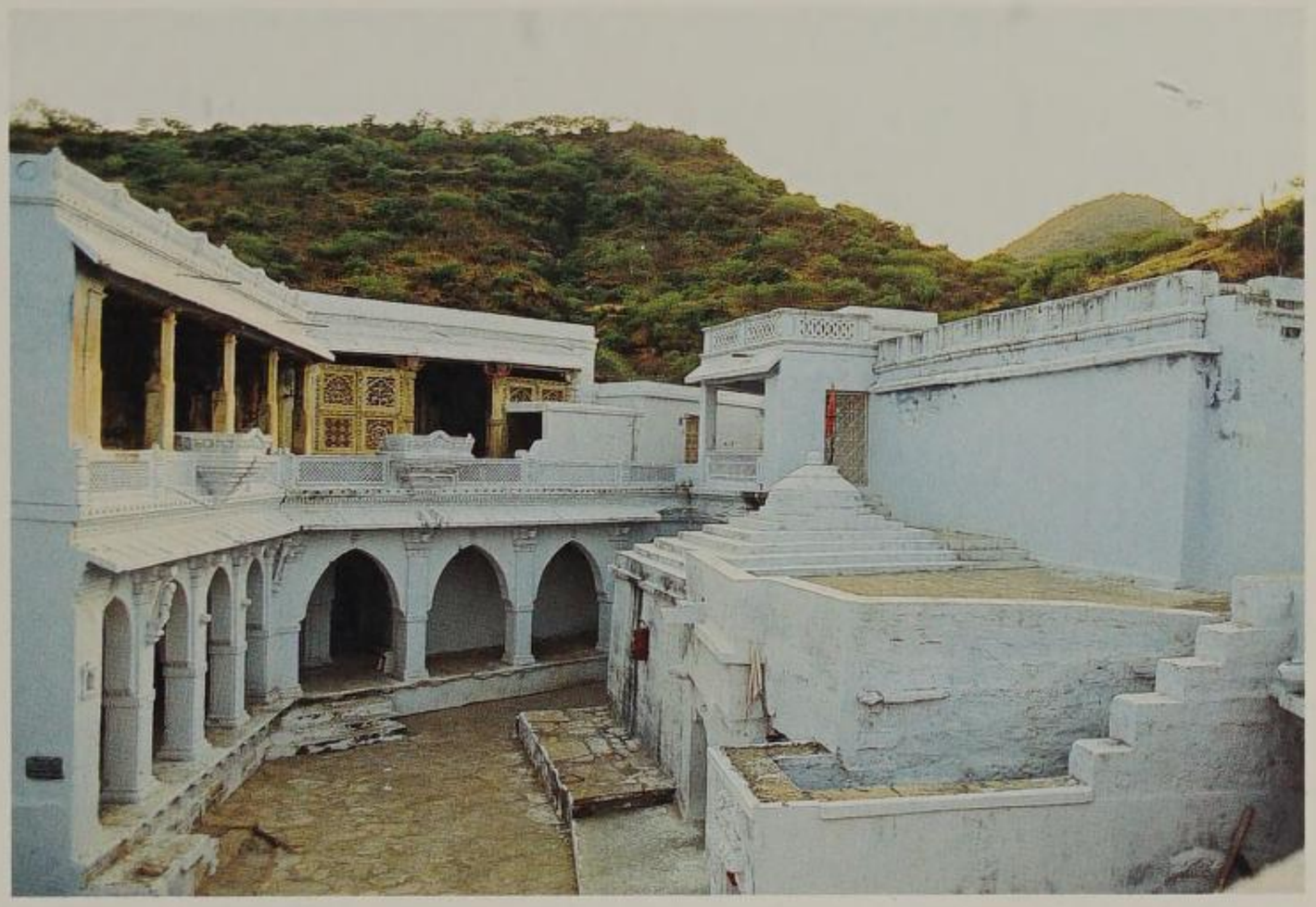
With the conquest of Sindh by the British and Kachchh no longer remaining strategic to them, tranquility descended on Kachchh. Rao Pragmalji II (1860-1875) utilised the opportunity for improving the management of his state. He framed codes for the guidance of his officers in matters of civil and criminal justice, undertook works of public utility and introduced a state system of education and public health. He even brought in

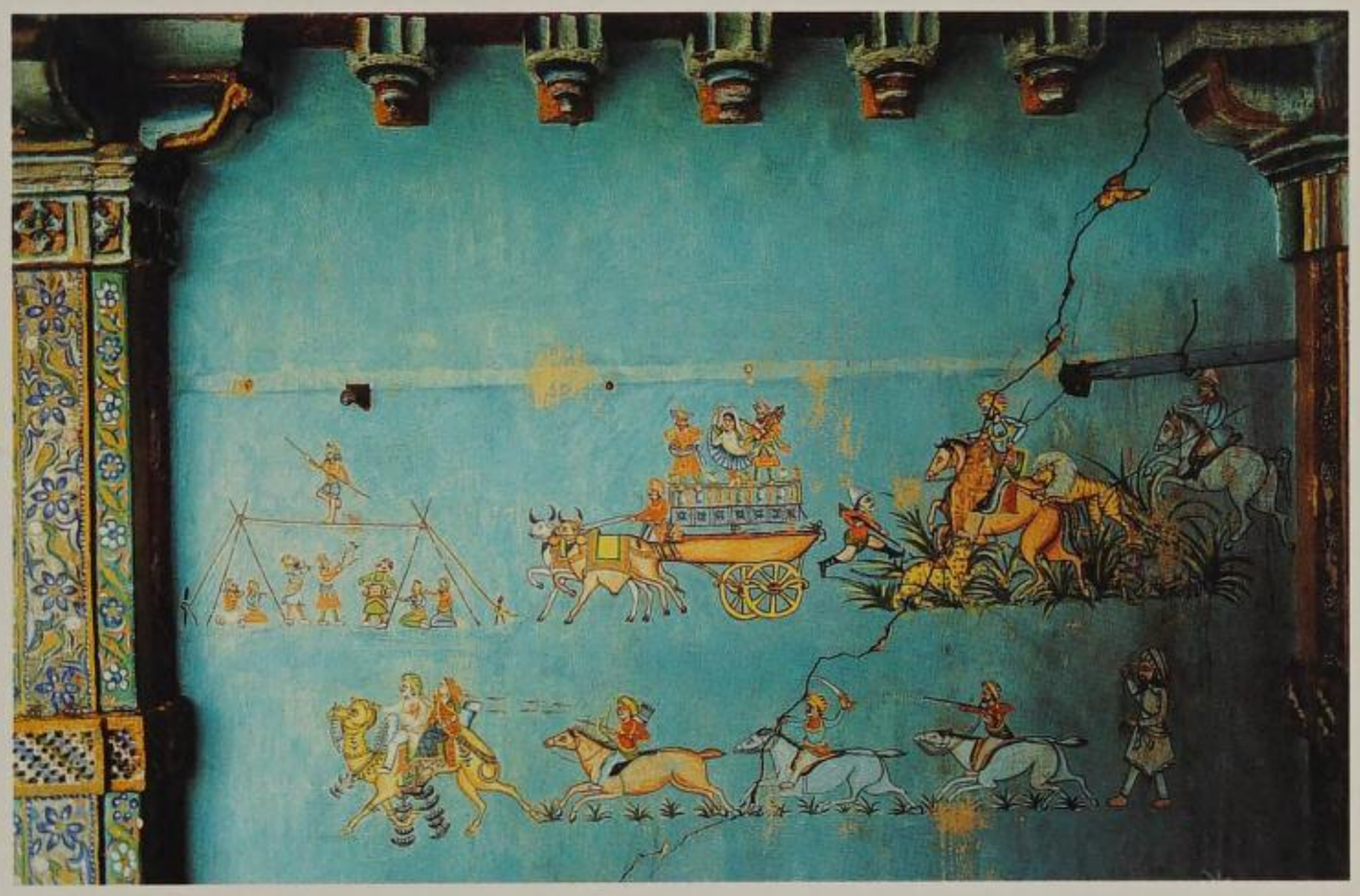


Top: The shrine atop Dhinodhar mountain, commemorating Dhoramnath's great penance.
Above: The remote Than monastery at its base with the Great Rann beginning in the foreground.

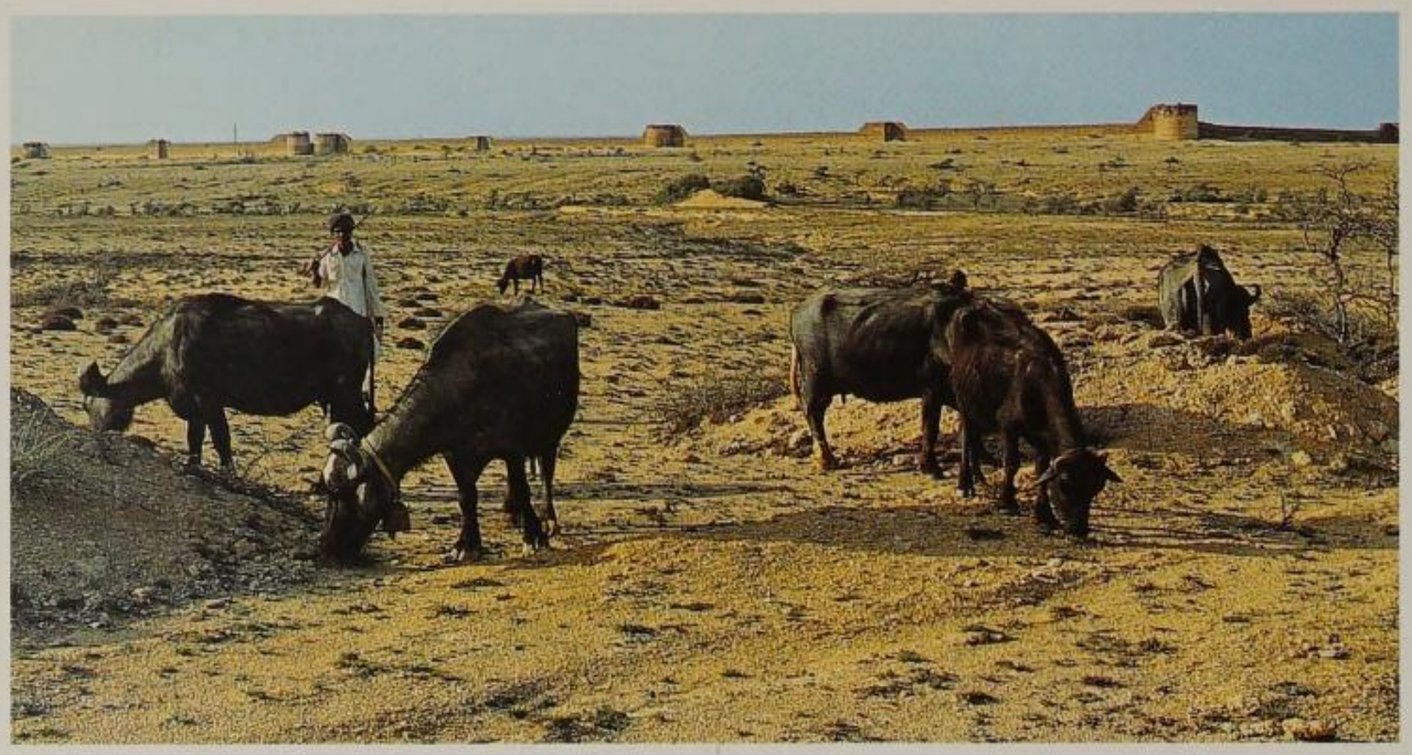
administrators from outside, including from Bombay. Unlike his forefathers, none of whom left Kachchh, he visited Bombay in 1870 to meet the Duke of Edinburgh, in 1871 to "take part in a Chapter of the Star of India", and in October 1875 to meet the Prince of Wales.

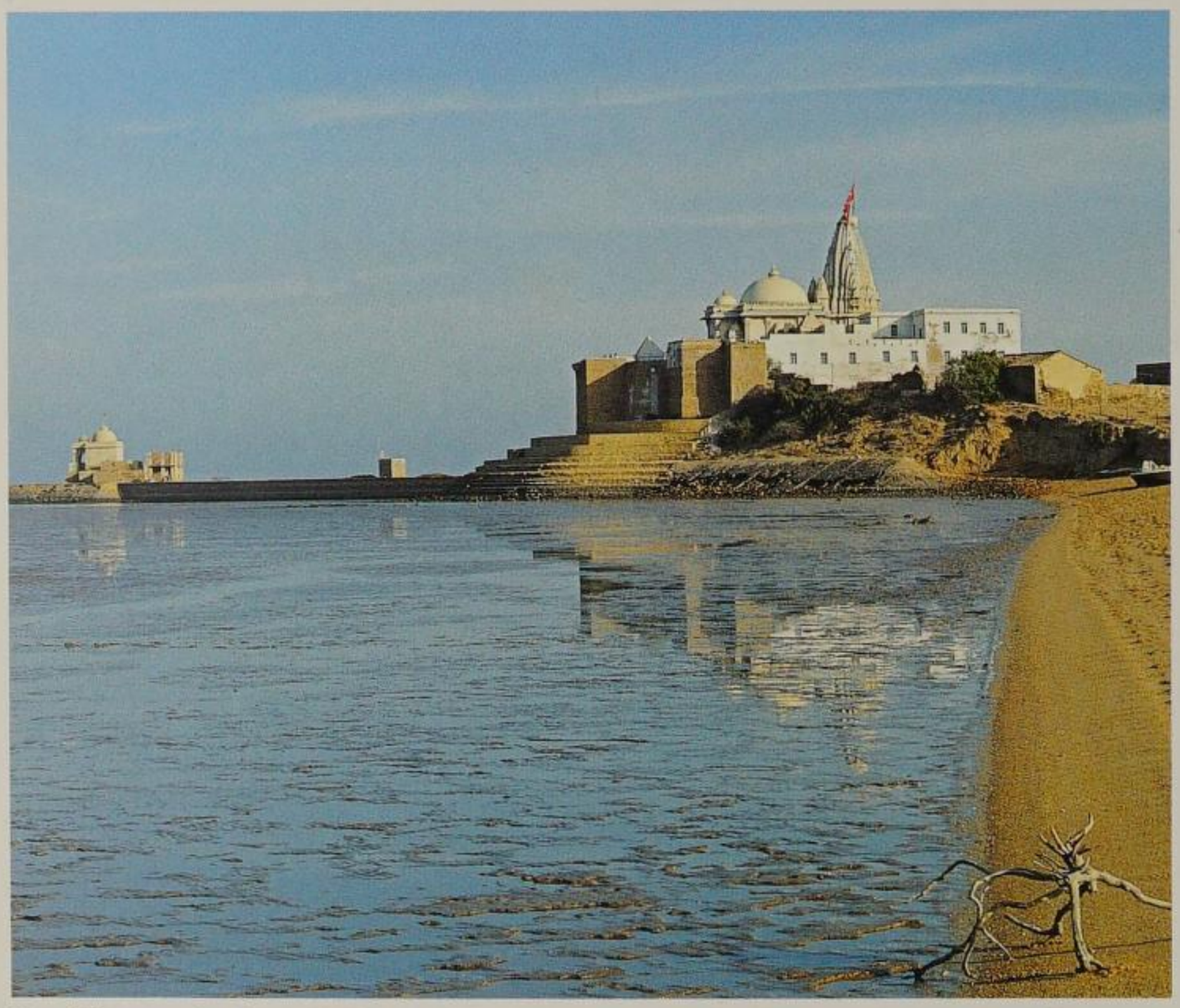
In 1865, Rao Pragmalji II started building a fabulous Italianate palace next to Rao Lakha's Aina Mahal. It has a clock tower one hundred and fifty feet high. The gallery floors are laid with Carrara marble and some of the rooms are paved with Minton tiles. The balustrades of the gallery parapets are of variegated marble. It has a splendid *durbar* hall, aptly described by Campbell as, "A noble hàll with walls and ceiling decorated by Italian artists, with marble pillars and architraves, mouldings and entablatures relieved with lavish gilding, with a pure white gallery running round its upper portion, upheld by huge carytides, with many coloured windows and doors of plate glass, marble floors, pendant crystal chandeliers, and in fact all ornaments that an Italian could suggest and money procure." Pragmalji II improved Mandvi harbour and made many tanks, including Pragsar in the Chadwa hill range, and the Hamirsar causeway at Bhuj, where he also built a new hospital, jail and stables. Pragmalji II was held in high esteem by Queen Victoria and was conferred the distinction of Knight Grand Commander of the Star of India. He died at the age of thirty-seven, after a fifteen-year rule. He was succeeded by Rao Khengarji III (1875-1942). As he was only ten years of age, a Regency was appointed consisting of the British Resident, the Chief Minister, a Jadeja and a leading merchant.





Above: A kamangari wall mural in the Than complex. Top: The Than monastery now lies deserted with inumerable graves of the Pirs, former heads of the shrine, all buried in a sitting posture with a Shivling on the surface.



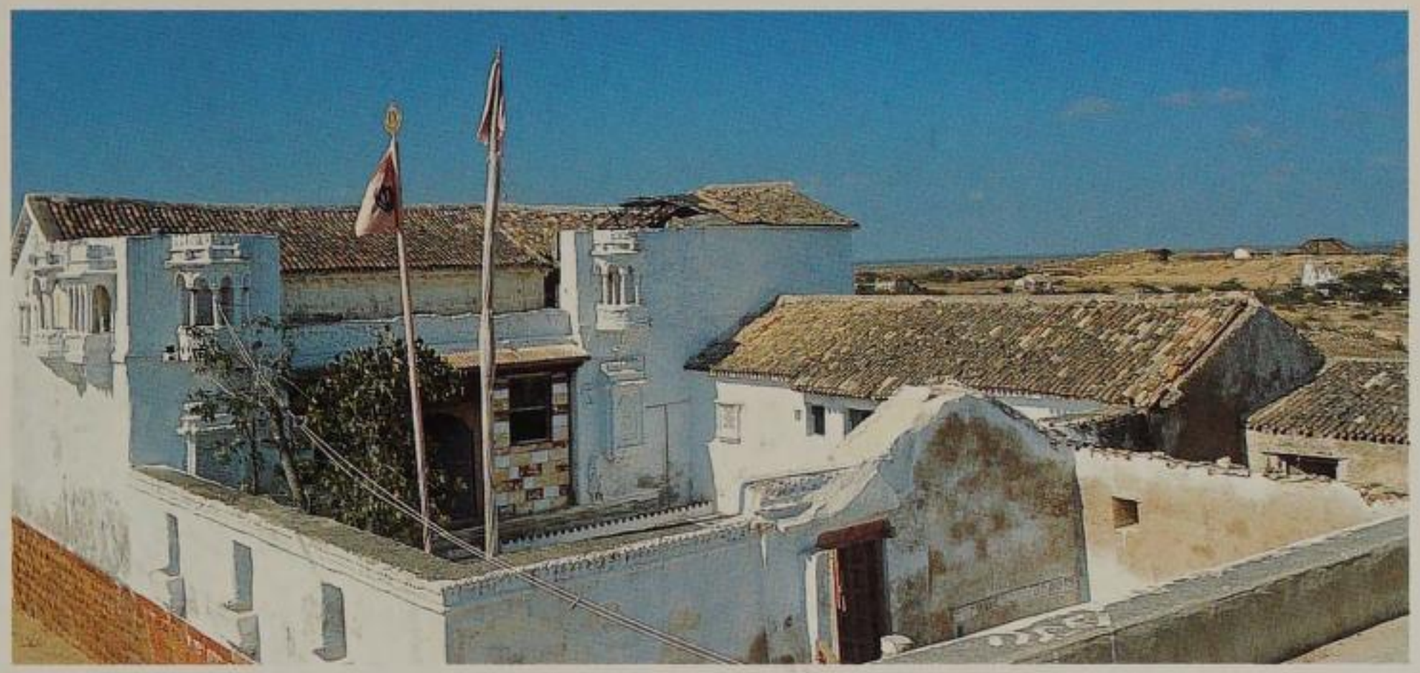


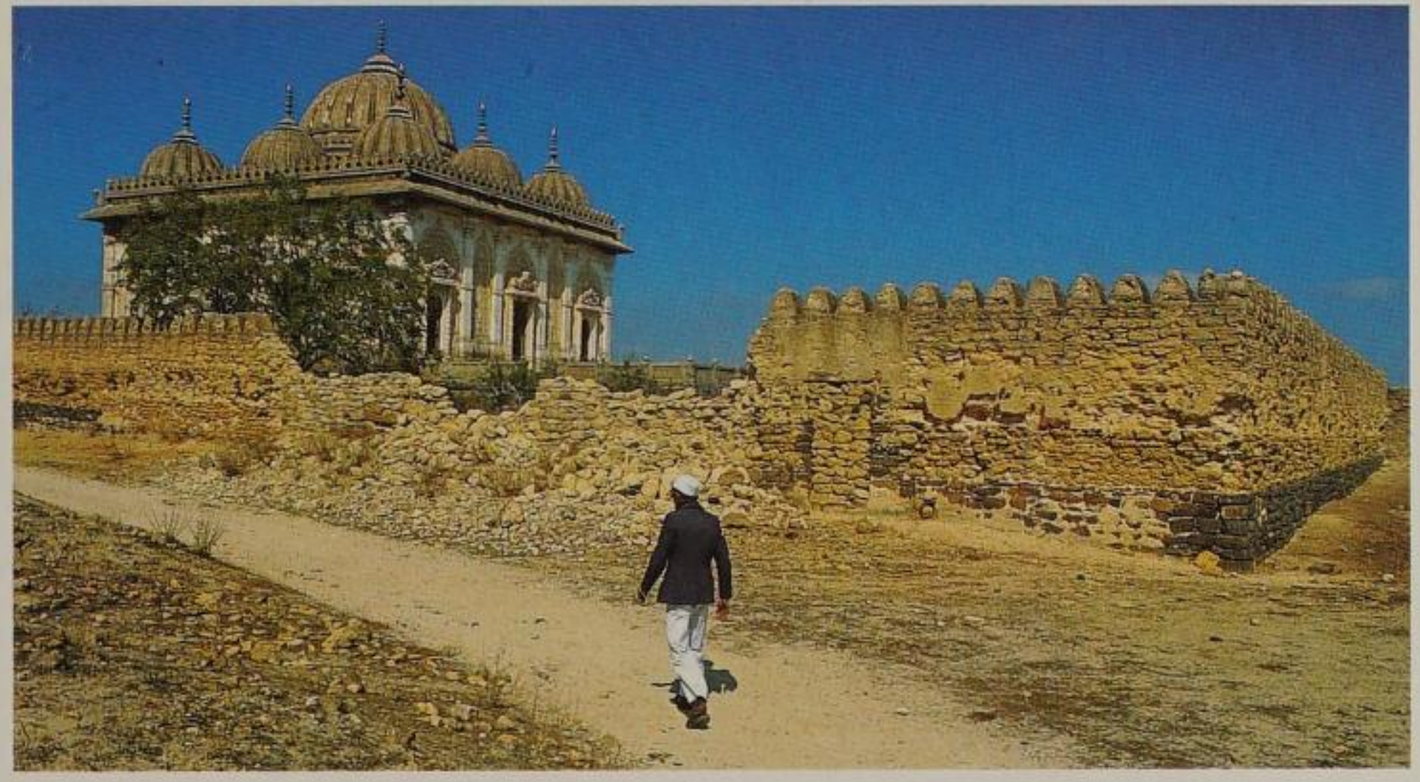
Top: The massive fort of Lakhpat on the western tip of Kachchh. Above: Koteshwar, and its adjoining Narayan Sarovar temple, are amongst the holiest of Hindu temples of India.

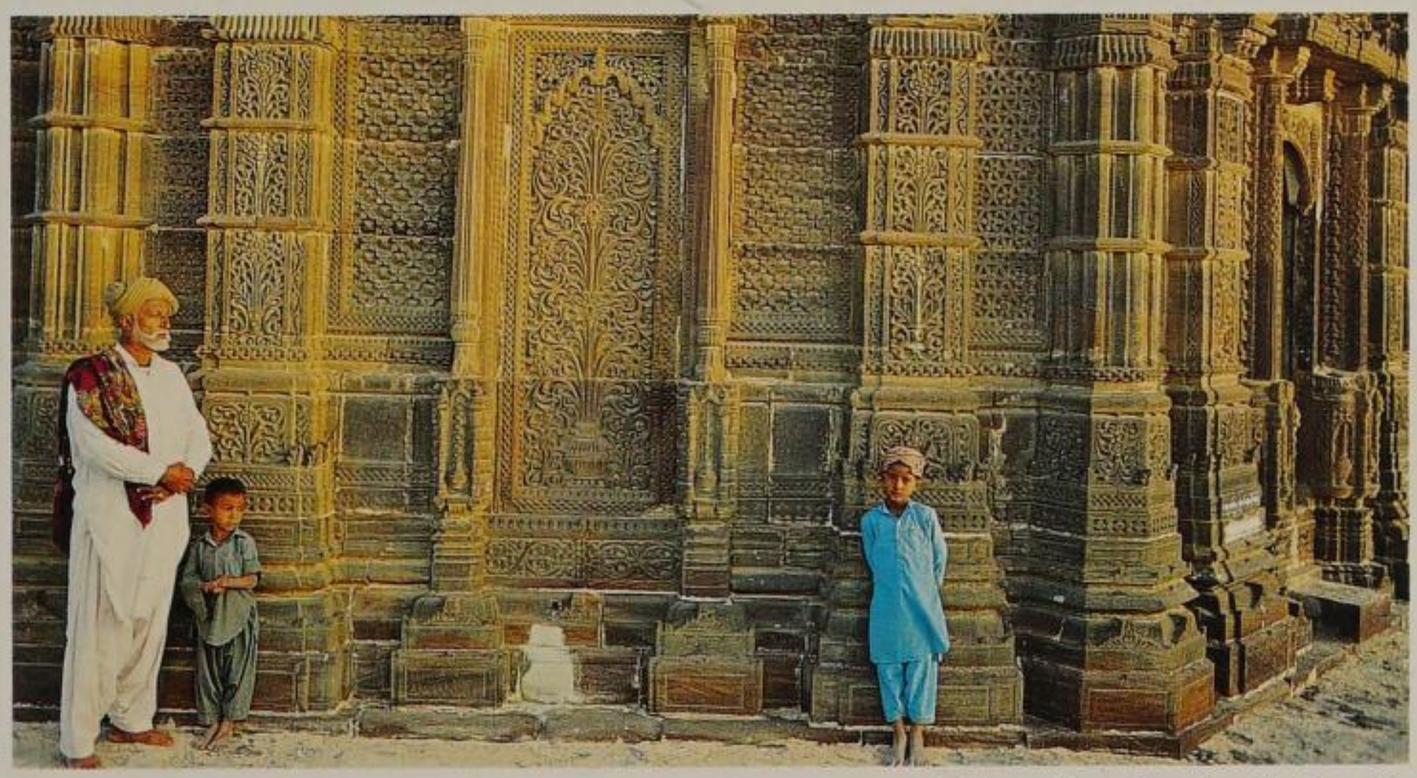
The decreasing dependency on the *bhayyad*, in favour of the mercantile classes, was notable in the formation of this council.

Rao Khengarji III grew to be one of the most remembered rulers of Kachchh. The administration of Kachchh was strengthened, regular departments and administrative divisions constituted. Trade and industries were encouraged. Khengarji took particular interest in forestry works and many of the protected forests, *rakhals*, in existence today, owe their origin to his foresight. Education was expanded and he even opened an arts school in Bhuj. He was created Knight Grand Cross of the Indian Empire and became one of the best known Indian rulers abroad. However, problems arose with the British regarding the collection of salt tax. Due to restrictions on salt export and also increased prominence of the Kathiawar ports, there was a decline in sea trade. Another setback to the interests of Kachchh in this period was the Kennedy Award of 1904. R. M. Kennedy, I.C.S., had been appointed by the British Government to decide the outstanding maritime and territorial issues between Kachchh and Morvi. His award greatly favoured Morvi, against the interests of Kachchh. Khengarji was succeeded by Vijayrajji (1942-1948) at an advanced age.

In the meantime World War II came and went but matters were generally quiet on the Kachchh front, except for planes occasionally dropping out of the skies, which provided for some excitement. In October 1941 an RAF aircraft force-landed near Kukma; in April 1942 a hurricane fighter crashed near Deshalpar; again in April 1942 an American flying fortress came down near village Rahpar Gadhwali and one of its pro-



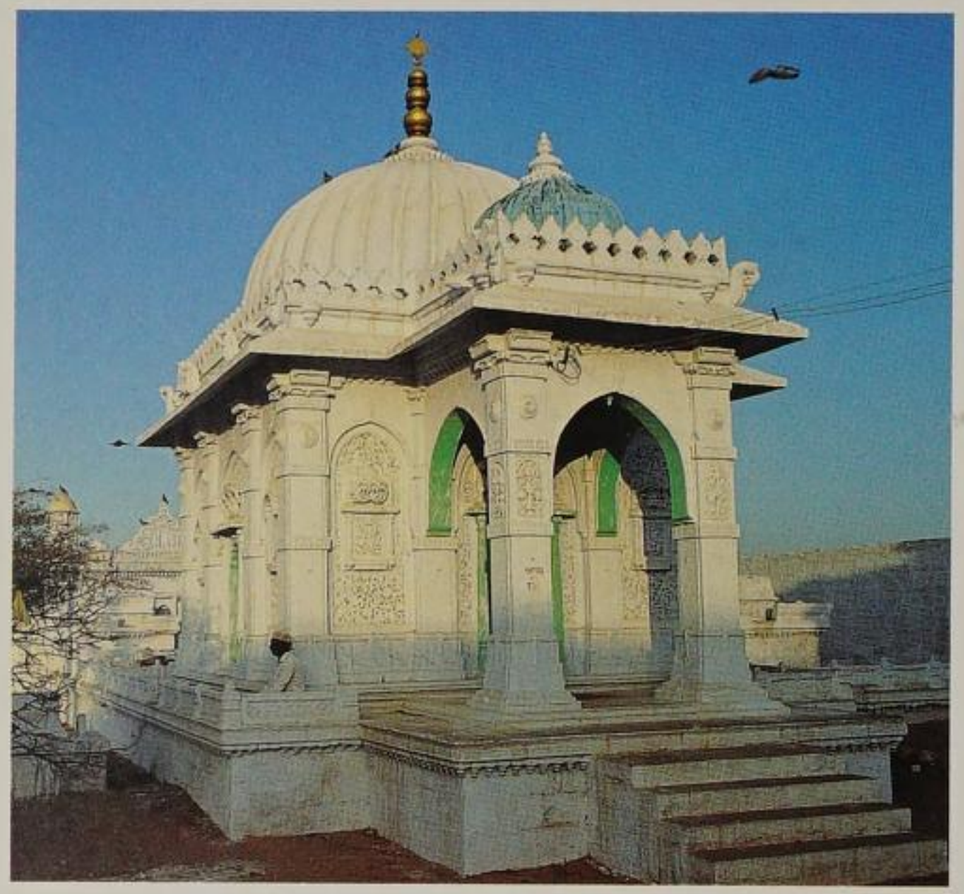


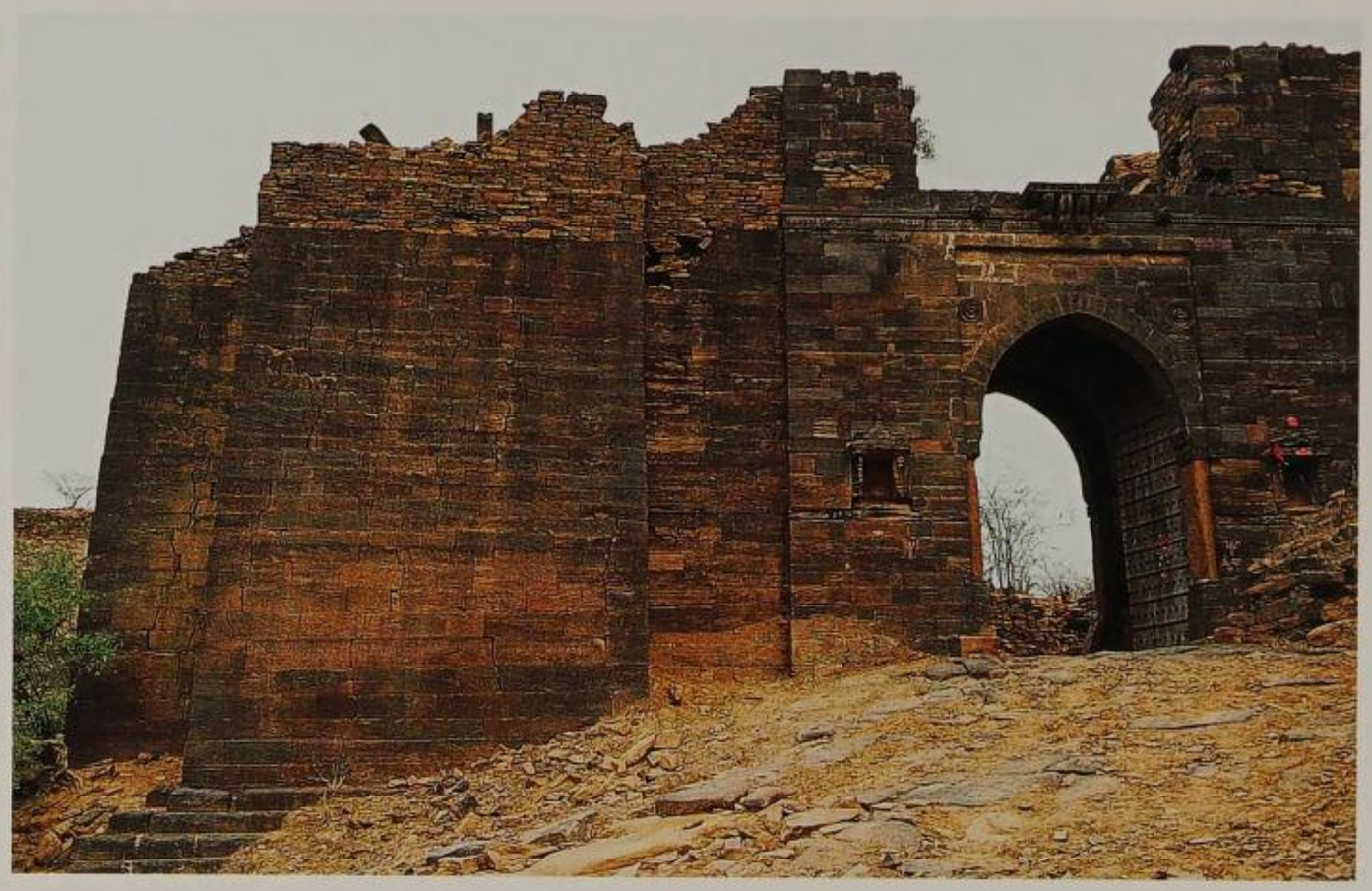


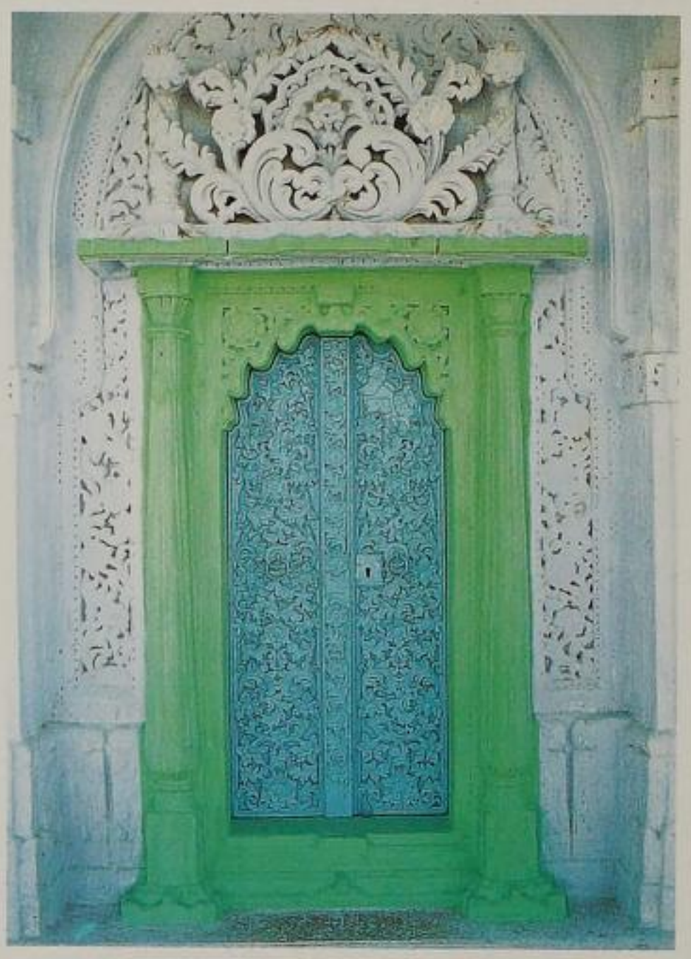
Top: The historic gurdwara at Lakhpat from where, it is said, Guru Nanak embarked on his pilgrimage to Mecca. Middle: Bava Mia's and (above) Ghaus Mohammeds tombs inside Lakhpat fort.

peller blades is still displayed in Ranjit Vilas palace; in April 1944 an American single-seater crashed near Koteshwar; in July 1945 a Dakota crashed near village Medisar and the authorities found out only when the pilot arrived at Bhuj on a camel. Earlier, in June 1944, a single-seater plane had crashed near Naliya. Clearly, here the intensity of the war was not felt unlike as in the eastern part of the country where, towards the end of the war, one of the fiercest battles was fought on the tennis courts of the Collector's residence at Kohima, the furthest the Japanese entered India. Even the pilots who came down over Kachchh were lucky and none was fatally injured. A Royal Air Force detachment was also stationed at Rudra Mata aerodrome. Before the war ended, a Kachchhi dhow rescued the crew of a torpedoed American ship, the S. S. Montanna. A special *durbar* was held at the city palace to honour the crew of the Kachchhi dhow and the American Consul himself came and presented medals to the crew of the country-craft. The Maharao's contribution to the war effort was limited to a Spitfire fighter plane and one company of the Kachchh state forces which was sent on garrison duty to Multan.

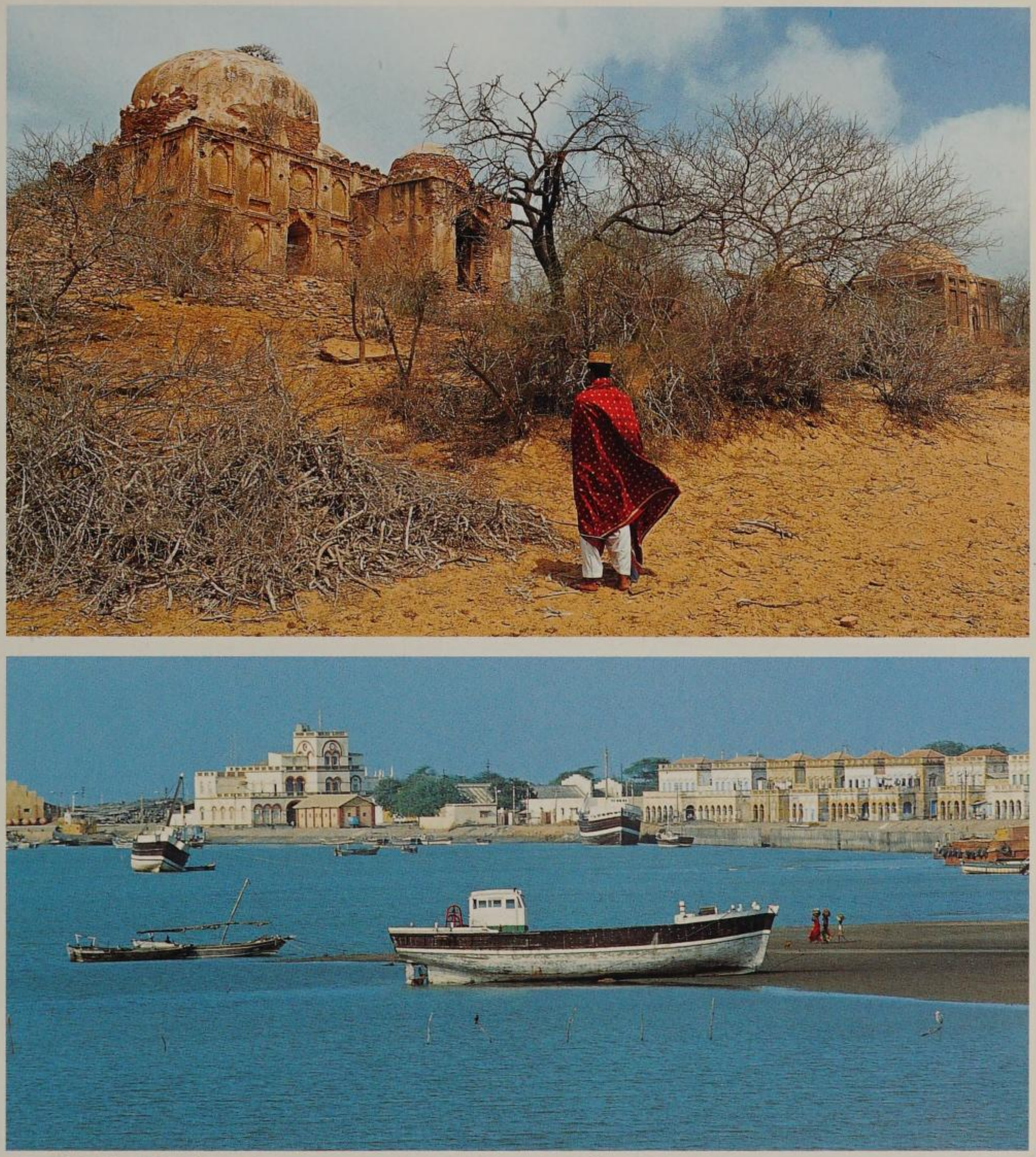
Madansinhji, Vijayrajji's successor, shortly after becoming Maharao signed the Treaty of Accession to the Indian Union. For him, two special clauses were added – the first granting him foreign exchange for travel and study abroad, and the second protecting the maritime rights of Kachchh. On 1 June 1948, Kachchh joined the modern nation of India. The transition from the rule of Maharaos to Chief Commissioners and Collectors and District Magistrates was complete. Madansinhji went on to serve in an honorary capacity as minister in the Indian High Commission in London in the early fifties, as India's first ambassador to Norway and as the Indian ambassador to Chile. He passed away at his London residence in June 1991. His eldest son Prithvirajji succeeded him as Pragmalji III, at a private ceremony in October 1991.







Top: The tomb of Jamadar Fateh Mohammed and his family members, Bhuj, and (above) detail of it's doorway. Right above: Kanthkot fort and (right) memorial stones within the fort.

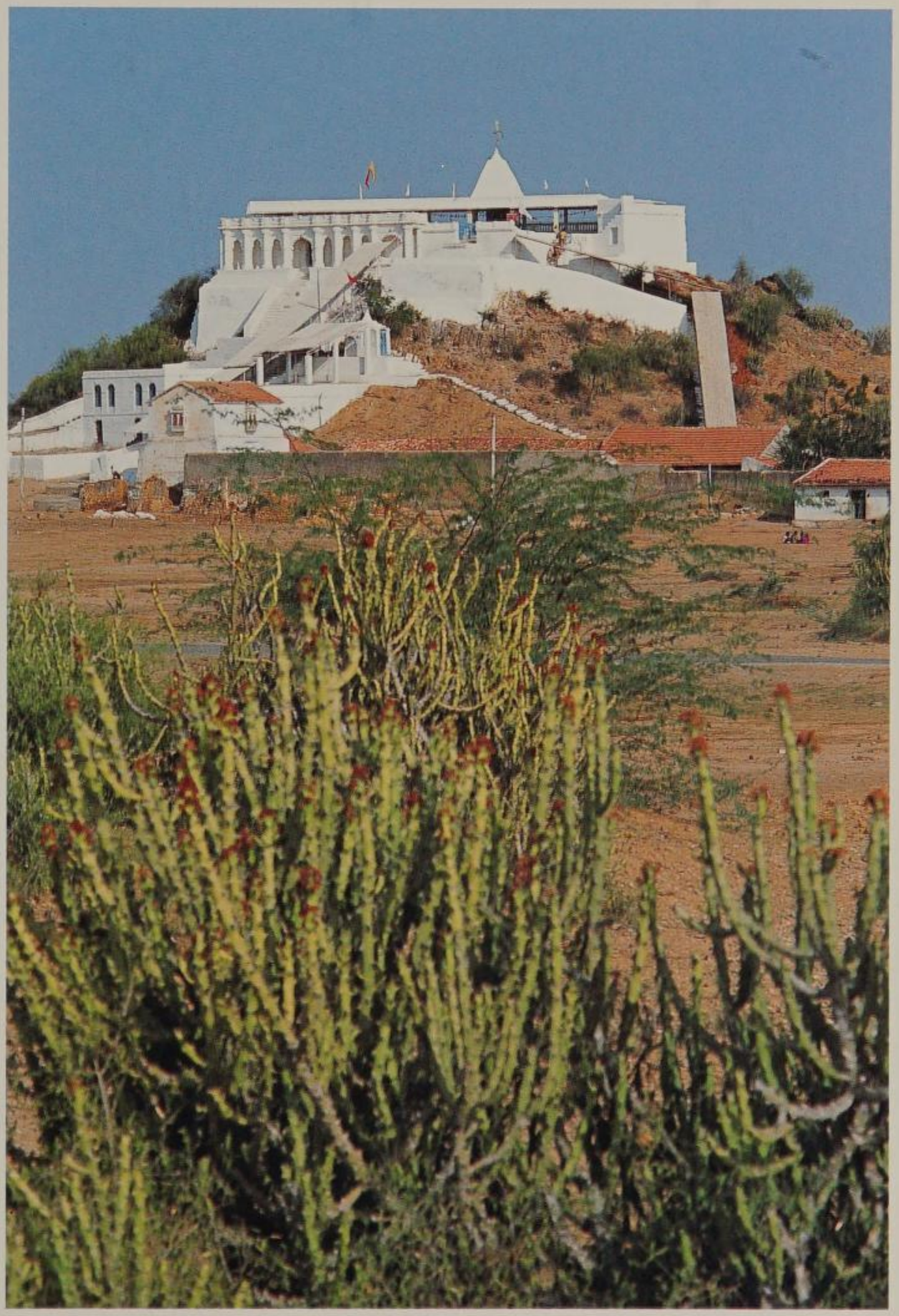


Above: The Mandvi harbour where country crafts are still constructed and sail to nearby international ports. Top: The mysterious tombs off the coast at Pippar.

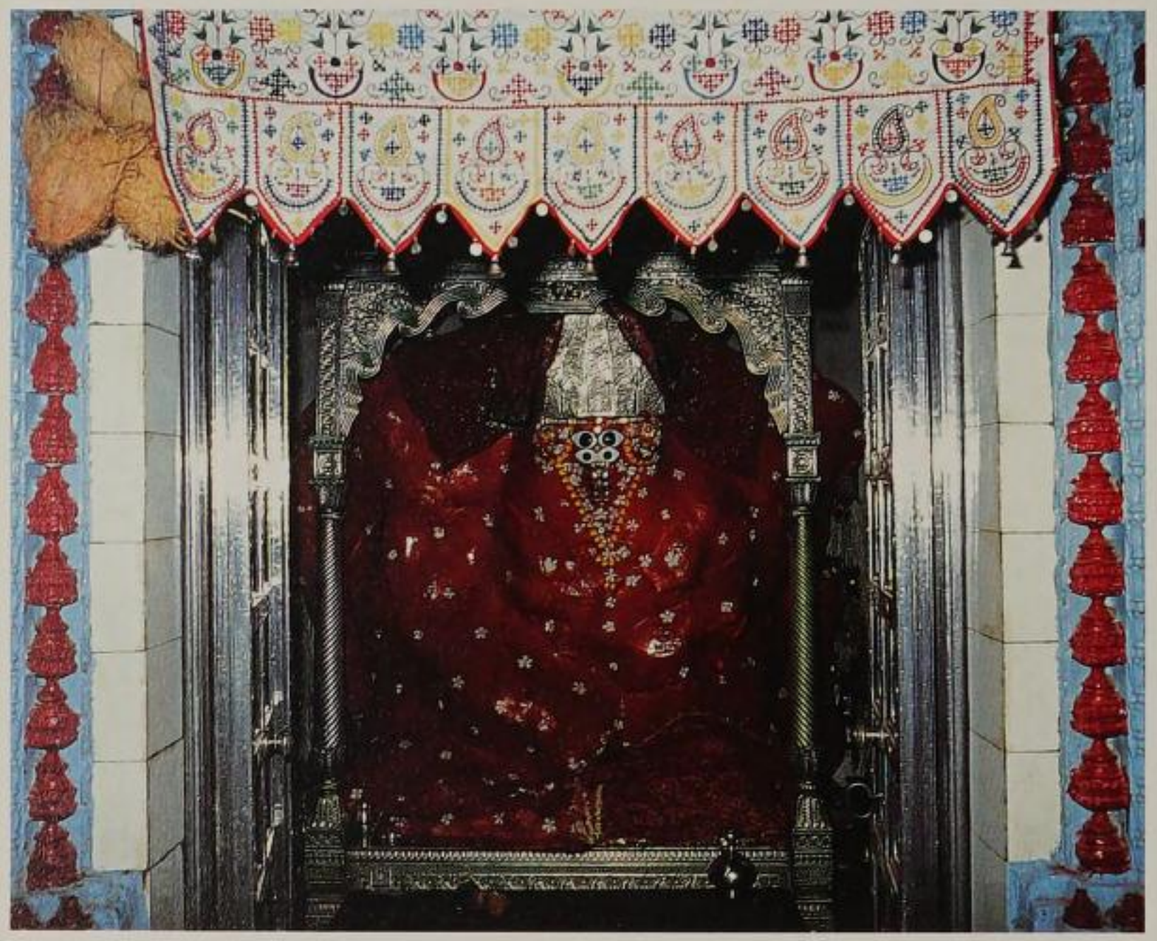
Fishing village near Jakhau, on the Godia creek.

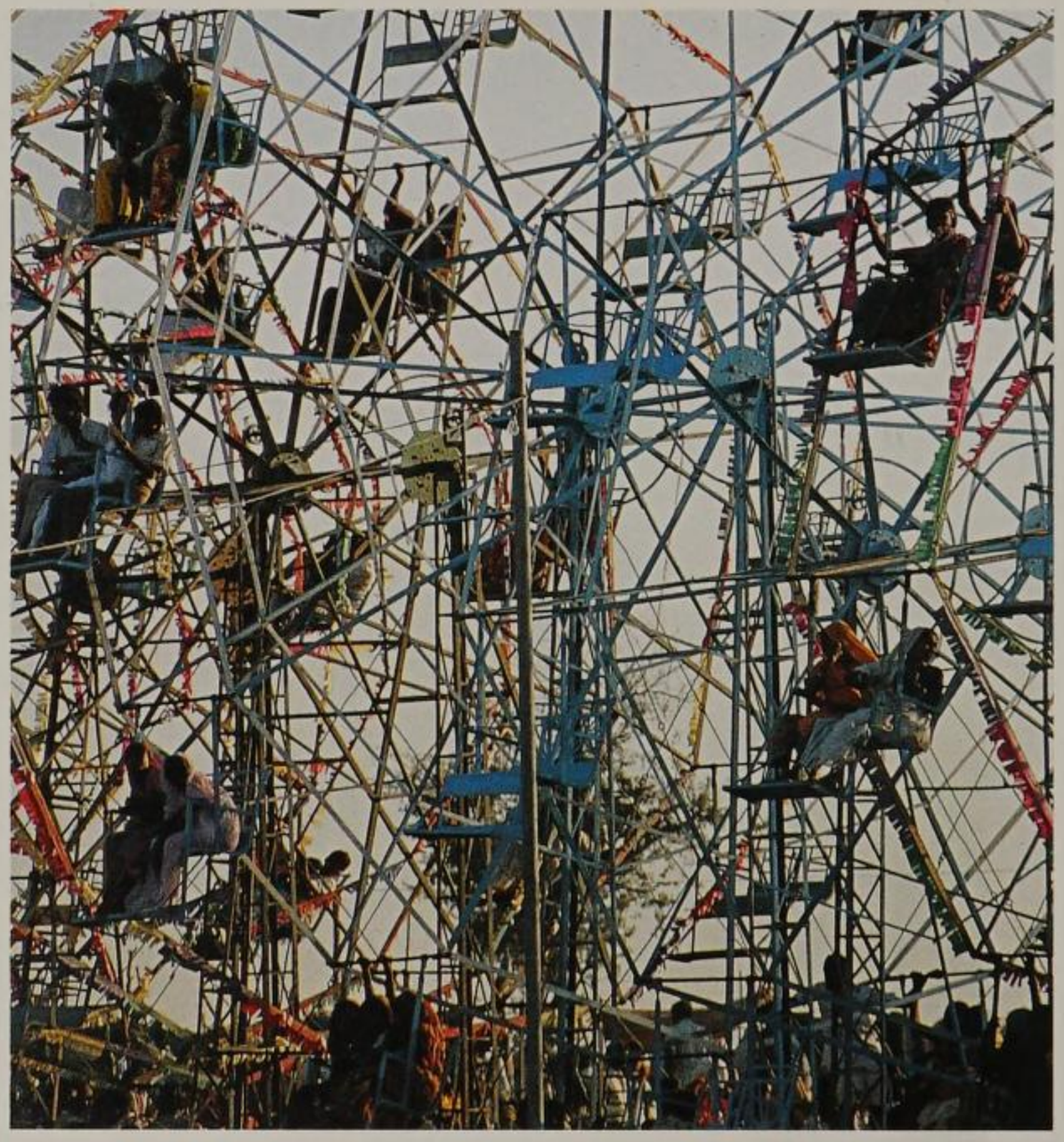
Kachchh is dotted with many remains of its past, though most of the historic structures were damaged by the severe earthquake of 1819. Vagham Chavdagadh or Patgadh, ten kilometres south-west of Lakhpat and in between present day Siot and Saira, has the ruins of the old city of Vagham Chavda. There are heaps of ashes and pieces of broken tiles and earthenware, apparently the sites of potters' kilns. There are two temples which stand on the sites of old buildings, those of Kateshwar (Shiv) and the temple of Kalika Mata. Close by are some ancient Buddhist caves. Another important ruined city in Kachchh is that of Vighakot in the heart of the Great Rann, on the earlier land trade route. Heaps of corroded copper coins are still to be found there. Near Deshalpur Guntri village are the walls of a ruined city rising from the Dharur river and earlier the villagers frequently found pieces of old vessels, coins and, occasionally, boxes of money. An old Mahadev temple is believed to hold a treasure guarded by a snake. On the banks of a small lake to the west of the fort are seven tombstones, *palias,* with peculiar designs but no writing. They are said to have been raised in honour of the seven claimants for the hand of Guntri, the adopted sister of the seven Sands, once the rulers of the fort. It was from the seven Sands that the Sammas, led by Mod and Manai, captured the fort and made themselves masters of Kachchh.

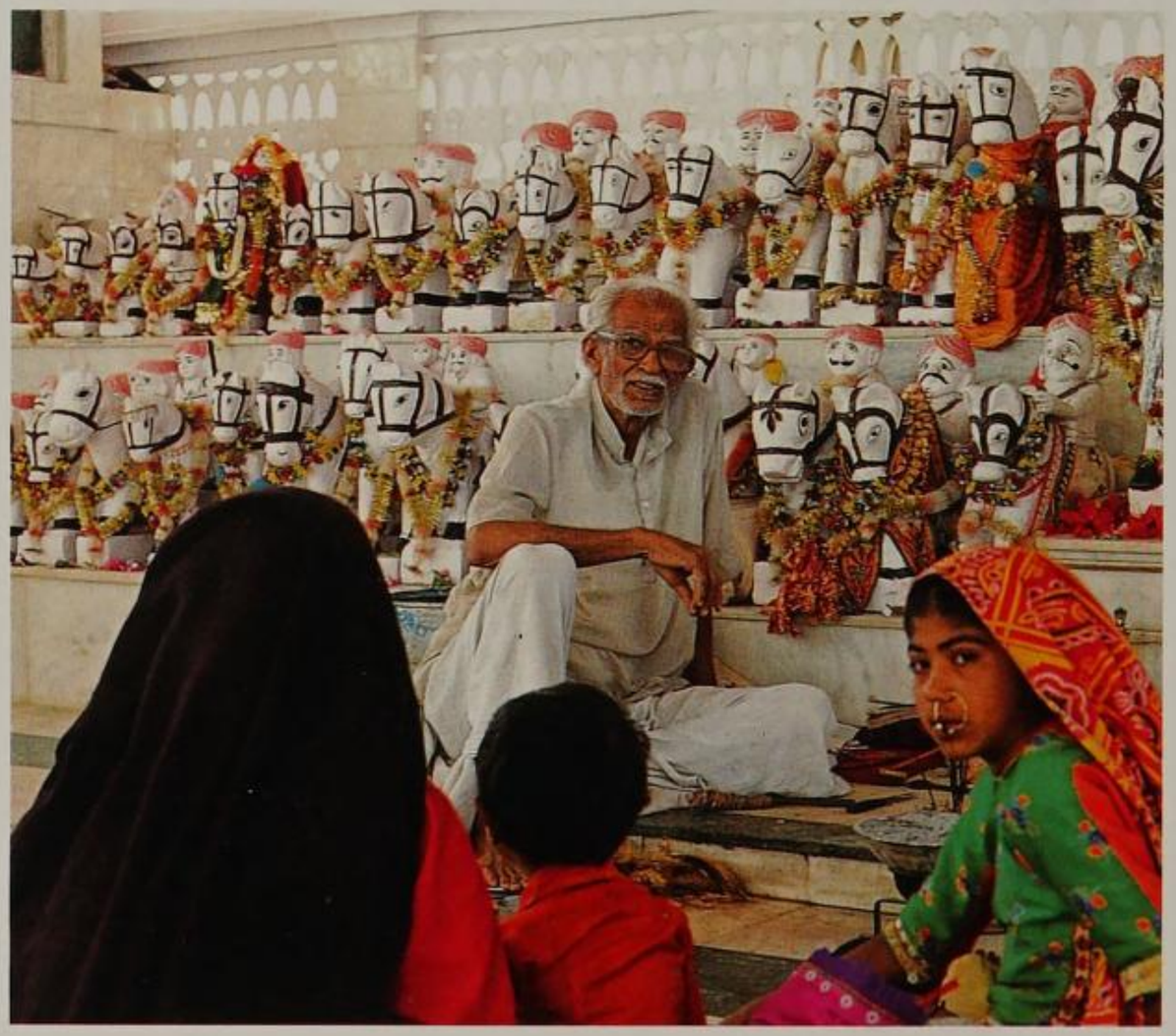
Bhadreshwar is on the site of Bhadravati, an ancient city. Of the earlier city there still remains a large step-well. In Bhadreshwar is the famous Jain temple which dates back to the tenth century, though new structures have been gradually added in the intervening years. The massive fort of Lakhpat is



Mota Jakh temple, made in honour of the mysterious horsemen heroes and their sister.

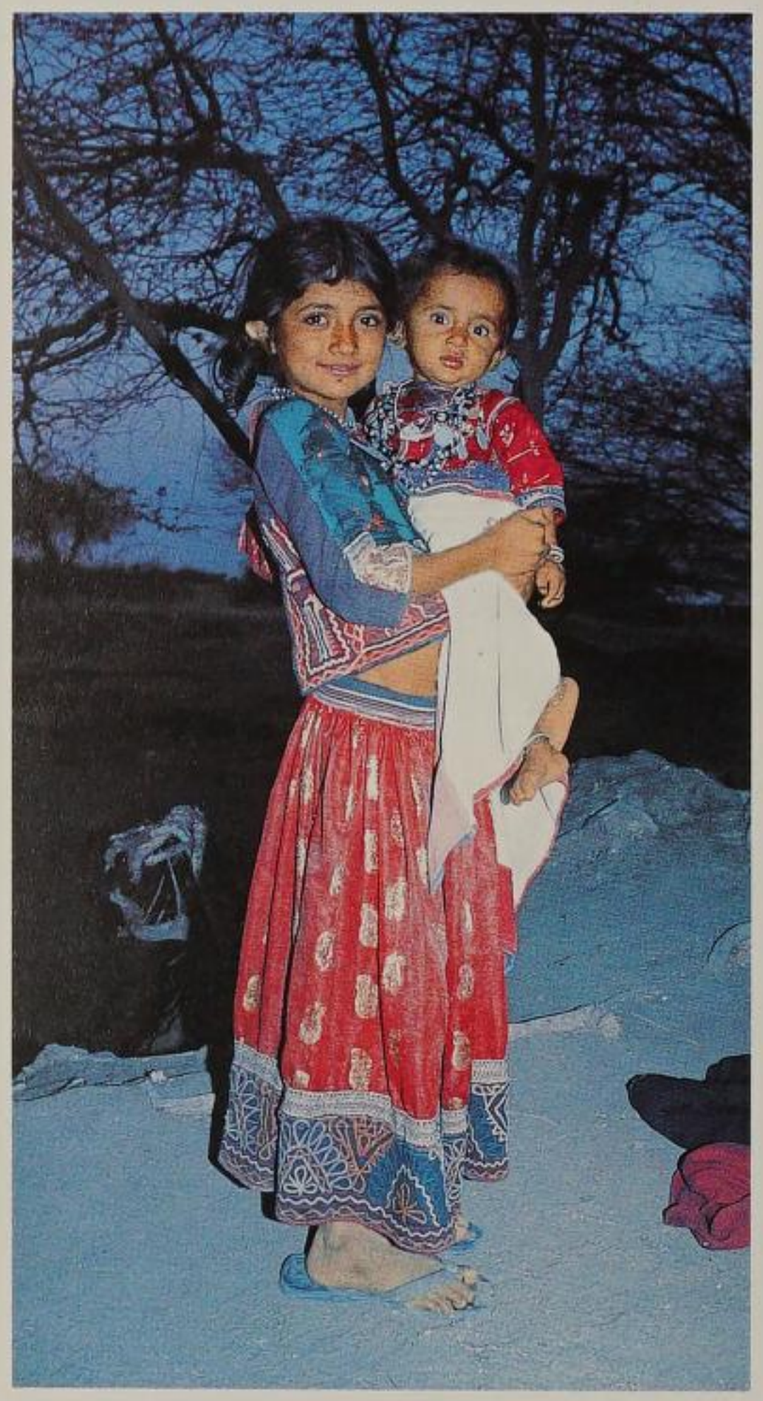




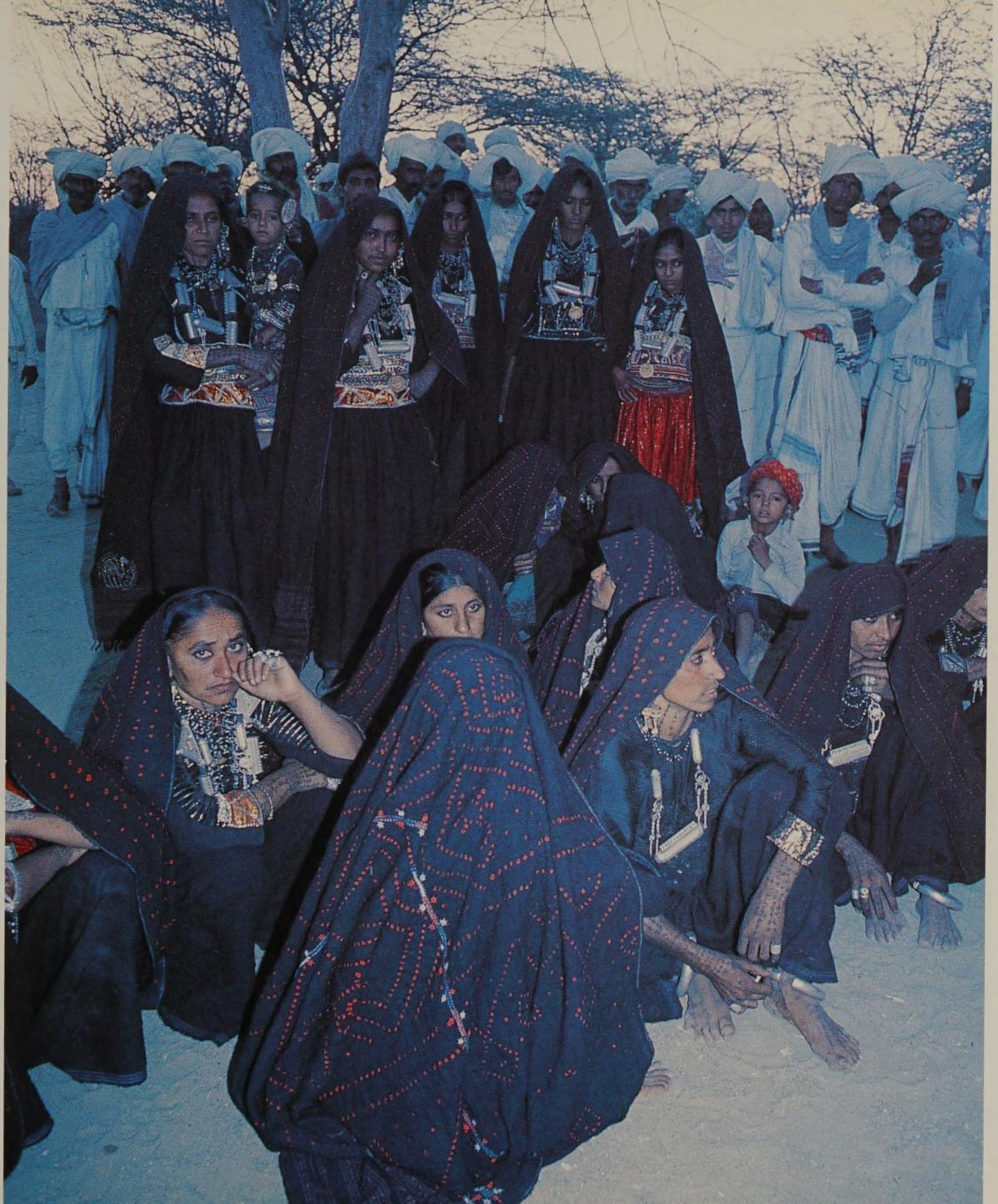


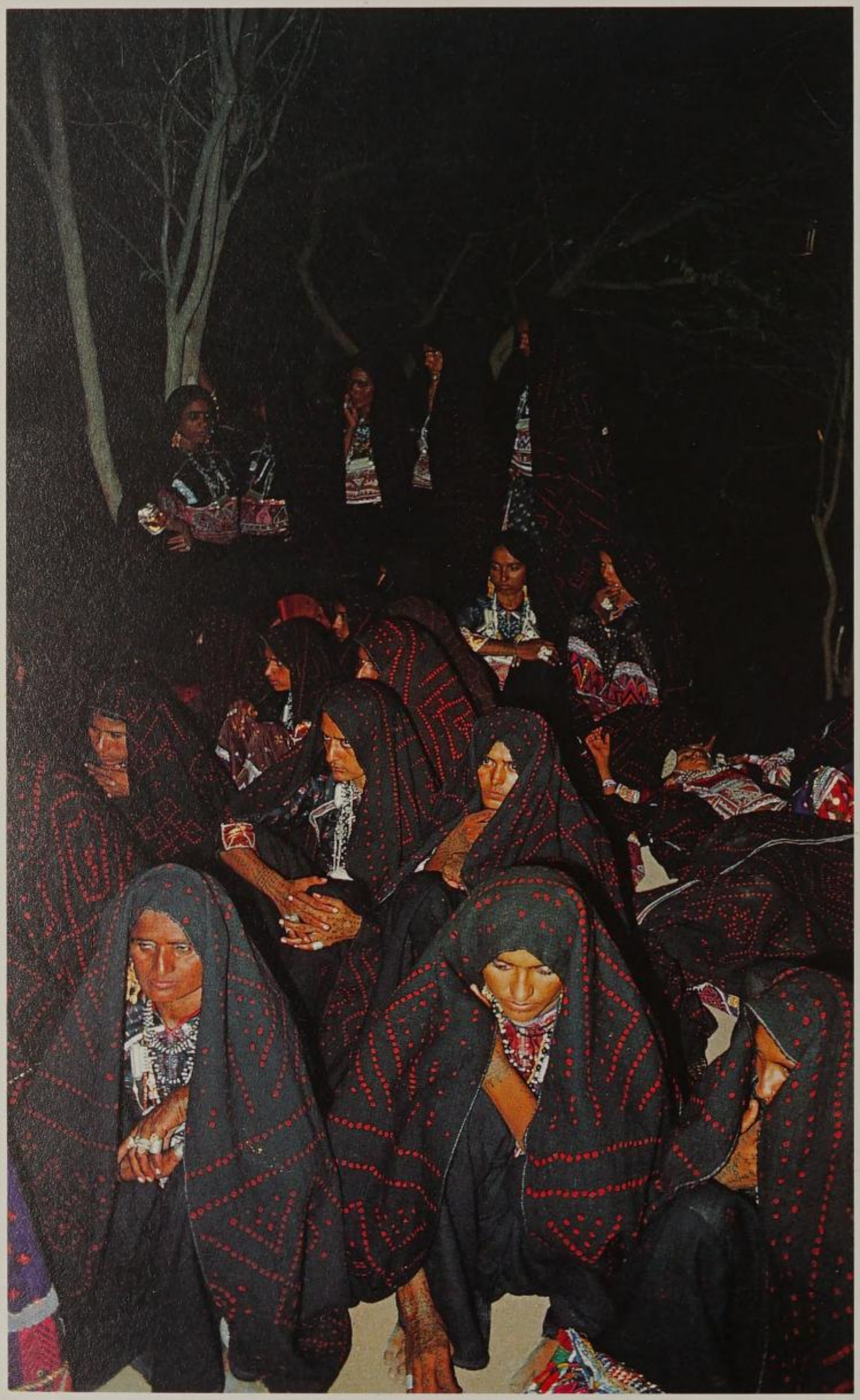
Right above: A medley of ferris wheels at the annual fair of Mota Jakh. Right: Nana Jakh, Madhapar. All the seventy-two Jakhs and their sister Saira are represented by stone idols. Above: Ashapura Mata at Mata-no-Madh, one of the most sacred temples of Kachchh.

The annual fair at Haji Pir.



Rabaris at Varasamedi, where they gather one night a year at their shrine for naming children. The chanting of prayers to drum beats reverberates through the night and, the ceremony over, they melt away into their tracks in the morning.



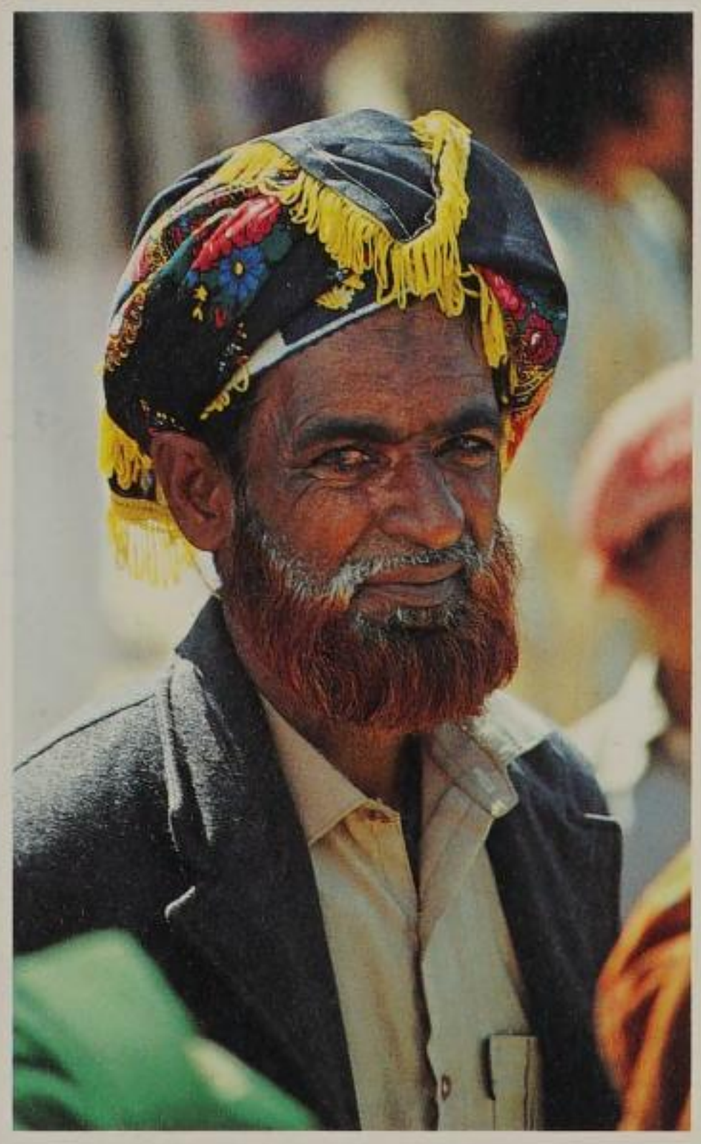


Above and opposite page top: Rabaris at the annual fair of Momay Mata, near Kotda Chakar.

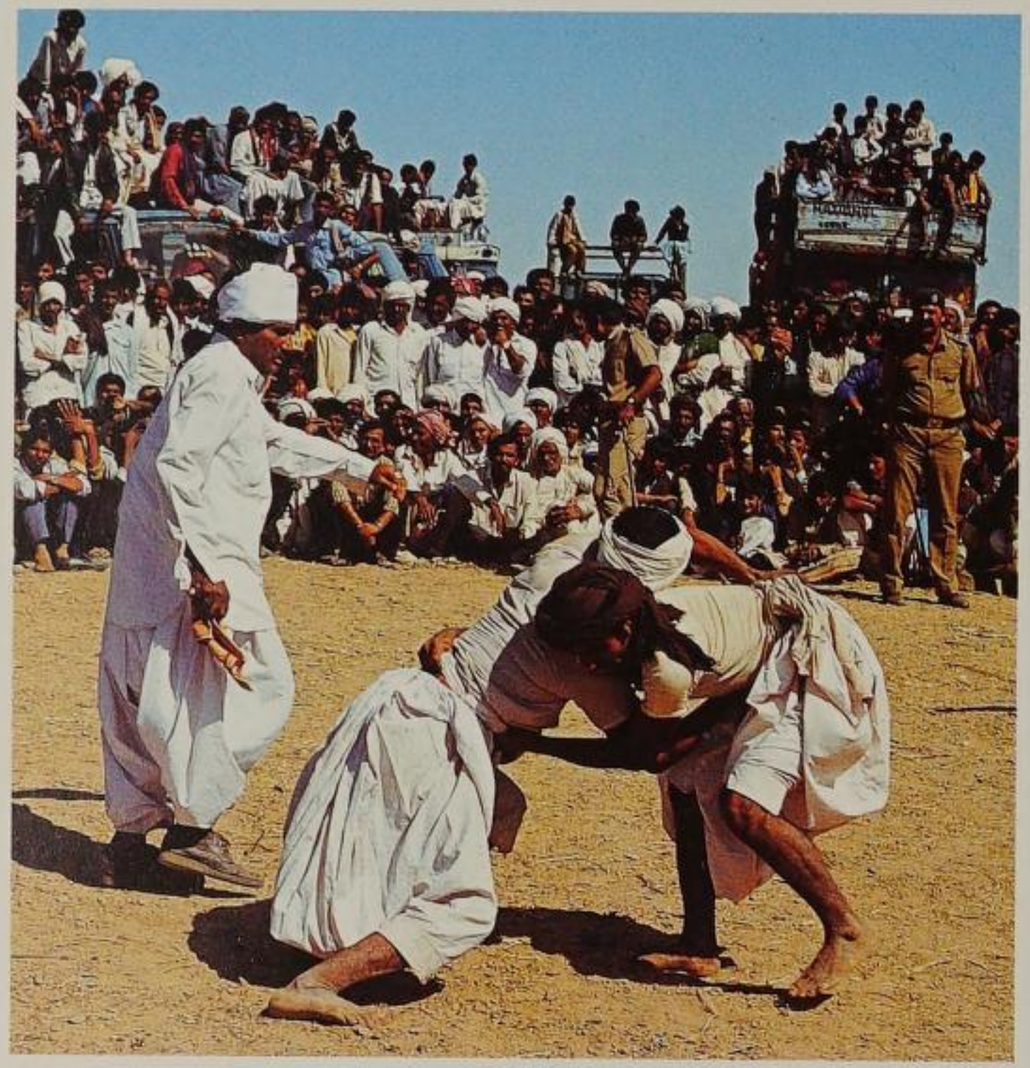
situated 135 kilometres from Bhuj, on the banks of the Kori creek. Lakhpat is named after Rao Lakha but it could also have been named so because of the many *lakhpatis,* millionaires, residing there when it was prosperous. The fort was built by Fateh Muhammad but declared against him in 1804. Its defences proved too strong even for him and he tried four times to take it back without success. The fort is an irregular polygon, nearly four kilometres in circumference. Inside are many temples, *dargahs* and a *gurdwara* from where, it is said, Guru Nanak made his sojourn to Mecca. Close to Bhuj are the impressive ruins of Kera, the legendary capital of Lakha Phulani.

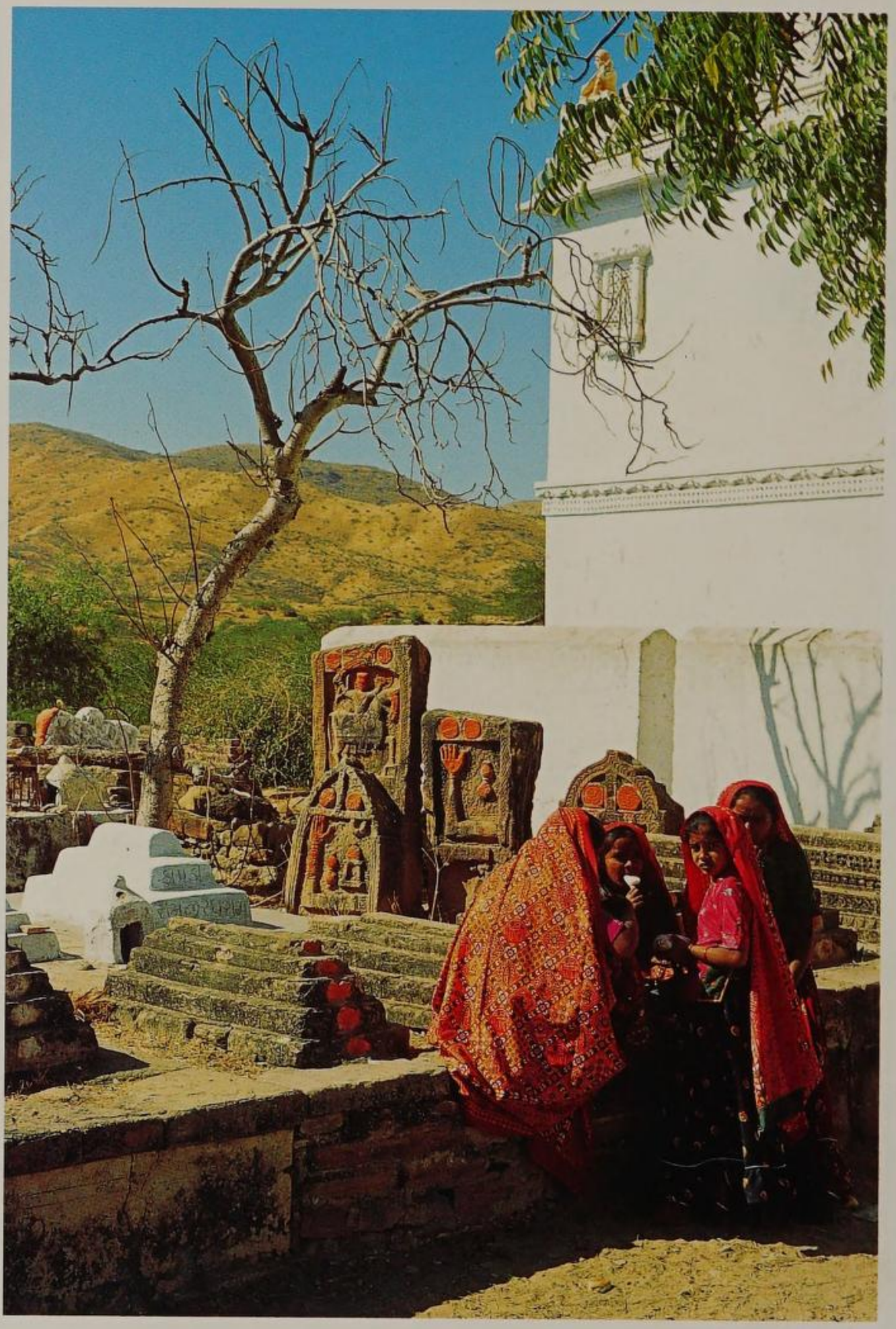
At Kanthkot in eastern Kachchh is a massive fort on a rocky plateau. In the eighth century it is said to have been the capital of the Kathis and later the Chavdas. According to legend, when work on the fort had begun a part of the wall crossed the fireplace of the great ascetic Kanthadnath who, in anger, destroyed it. He was only appeased when it was decided to name the fort after him. At the close of the sixteenth century it is mentioned by Abul Fazl as one of the important forts of Kachchh. Inside are the remains of three temples – that of Kanthadnath, an old Jain temple and a sun temple.

In Punvaro-no-gadh, near Manjal, are the remains of what must have been a great city. In 1813 a large number of Indo-Sassanian coins were found buried in a copper vessel. It has the ruins of two palaces, a mint, and a temple of Mahadev. According to legend, Punvaro-no-gadh was built about a thousand years ago by a cruel ruler named Punvar. He resolved to found a city and call it after himself. When the city was finished the architect was rewarded by having both his hands chopped off so that he might not repeat the work for anyone else. Soon after, seven devotees renowned for their virtues and miracles came from Syria and settled on a high hill near Punvaro-no-gadh. Hearing of their fame, Punvar's childless queen had an

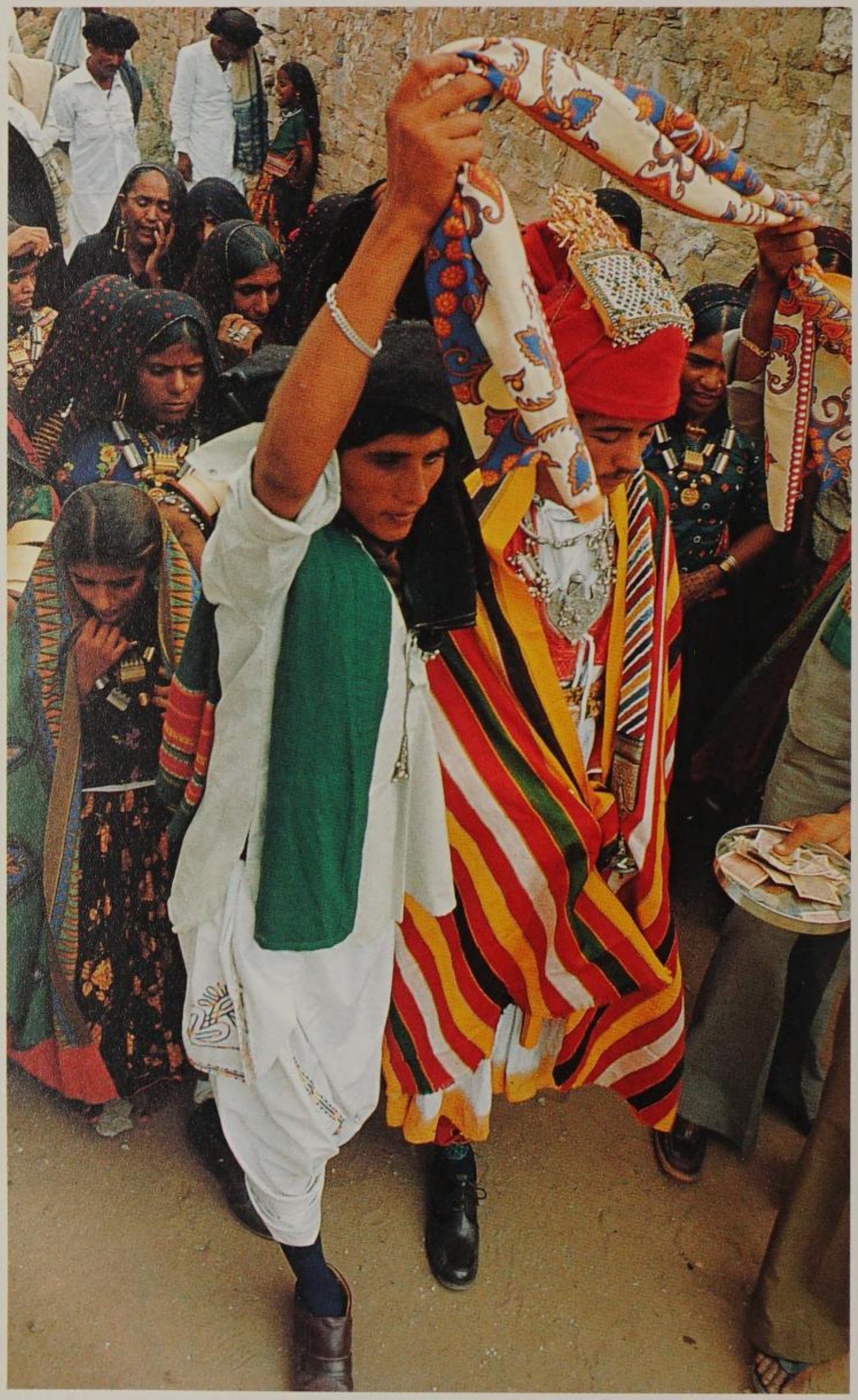


Above and right: Annual celebrations at Mai Bhambi's shrine, Sumrasar Jath.





Festivities at the annual fair held at Mekan Dada's shrine at Dhrang. Mekan Dada was known as the saviour of pastoralists who got lost in the Rann and its adjoining Banni, close to which is this temple. He is worshipped by nomads of all religions.



Rabari marriage procession. They have mass marriages on the birthday of Lord Krishna

underground passage dug from the palace to the devotees' hill. She helped them in the service of their god, Yaksh, or Jakh. After six months she asked them to pray to god to give her a son, but the prayer could not be granted until a sacrifice was offered in the palace. The holy men entered the palace through an underground passage and were performing their rites when Punvar, hearing there were strange men in the women's rooms, forced his way in, seized the devotees and set them with bare feet to tread out corn on a threshing floor bristling with spikes. Pitying their suffering, a friendly barber offered to take the place of one of them while he went to call Yaksh to their aid. Yaksh heard the prayer and, with an earthquake that shook the hills, appeared with seventy-one brothers and a sister, Sayari. Called upon to give up the holy men, Punvar refused. Yaksh cursed the town and it has since lain desolate. Another story is that Punvar was oppressing the community of Sanghars. They sought the aid of some foreigners from western Asia. Seventy-two horsemen came and, establishing themselves on a hill near Punvaro-no-gadh, took the fort and killed the chief. In their honour the Sanghars made images of the seventy-two horsemen, set them on a red platform on Punvaro-on-gadh with their faces towards the south and instituted a yearly fair. This temple is presently called Mota Jakh.

Many Harappan sites have been found in Kachchh so far, including Dholavira Kotdi, Shikarpur, Kerasi, Deshalpar, Netra-Khirsara, Surkotda, Bhadli, Kotda, Jhangar, Kotara, Selari, Moruvo, Pirwada Khetar, Khari-ka-Khanda, Nenu-ki-Dhar, Lakhapar, Meghpar, Pabumath, Sevakia and Chitrod. The jewel among the sites is Dholavira with its twin mounds. Its various stages have been dated from 3000 B.C. pre-Harappan, to 1900 B.C., late-Harappan. Discovered in 1967-68, it is the fourth or fifth largest such site in the subcontinent, after Mohenjodaro, Harappa, Gharo Bhiro (all in Pakistan) and Rakhigarhi in India. Amongst the excava-

Top: Jain temple, Bhadreshwar. Above: Swaminarayan temple, Bhuj.

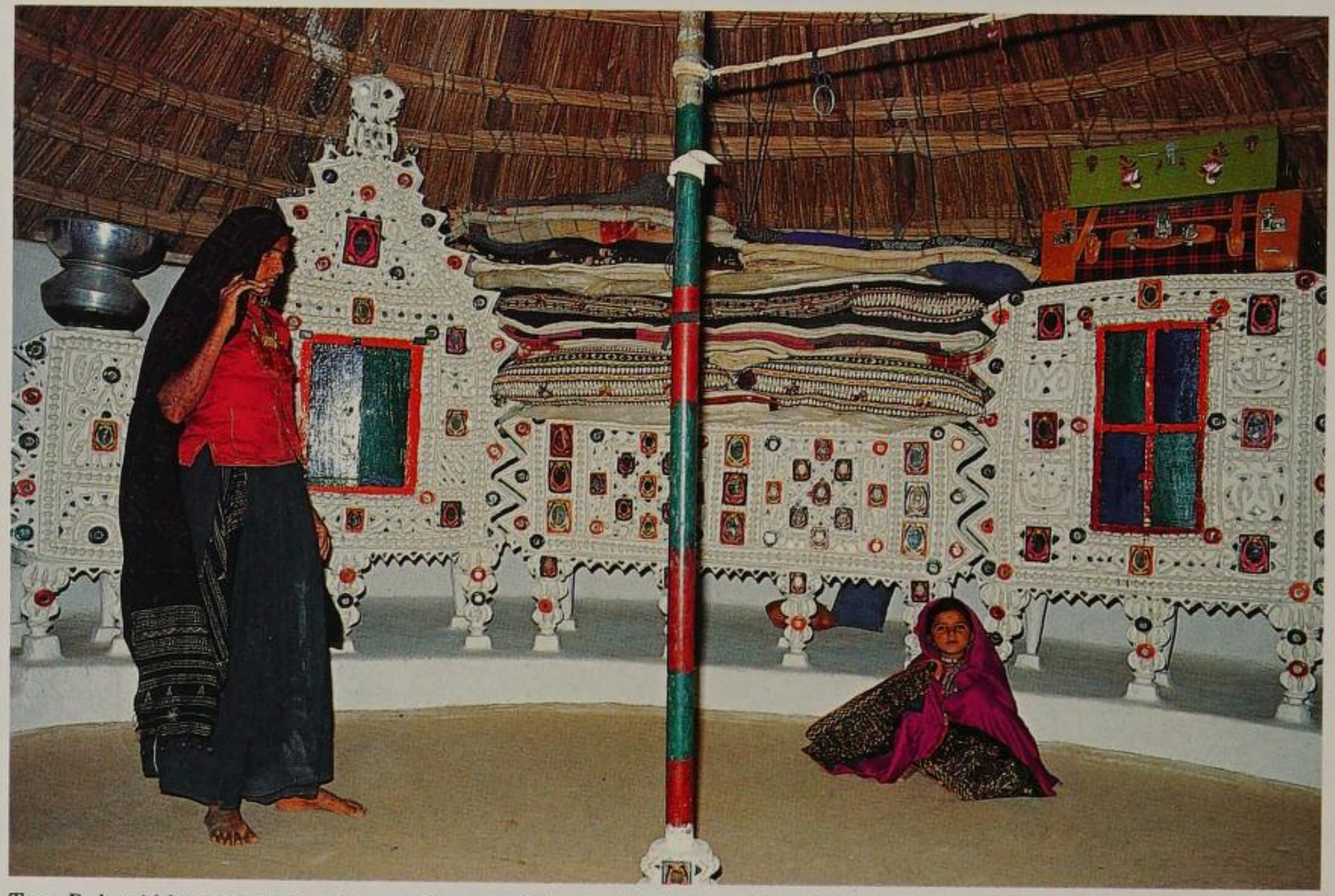
The Rabari settlement at Tunda wandh.

tions have been identified the main citadel or acropolis, middle town and lower town, along with defensive walls, bastions, gateways and elaborate water channels. Many stone columns and bases have been found *in-situ*. The artisan guild areas appear to be well demarcated, yielding ancient work materials and products. The items found include pottery, flint blades, ornaments of copper and gold, stone beads and many steatite seals. Construction materials vary from walls of mud bricks and mortar to local sandstone. Implements have also been found in Kachchh from the early to late stone age. Eight Kshatrap inscriptions, some dating to the first and second centuries A.D., were found at Andhau, in Pachham. They indicate the rule of Kshatrapa, from the time of Rudraman to Rudrasinha.

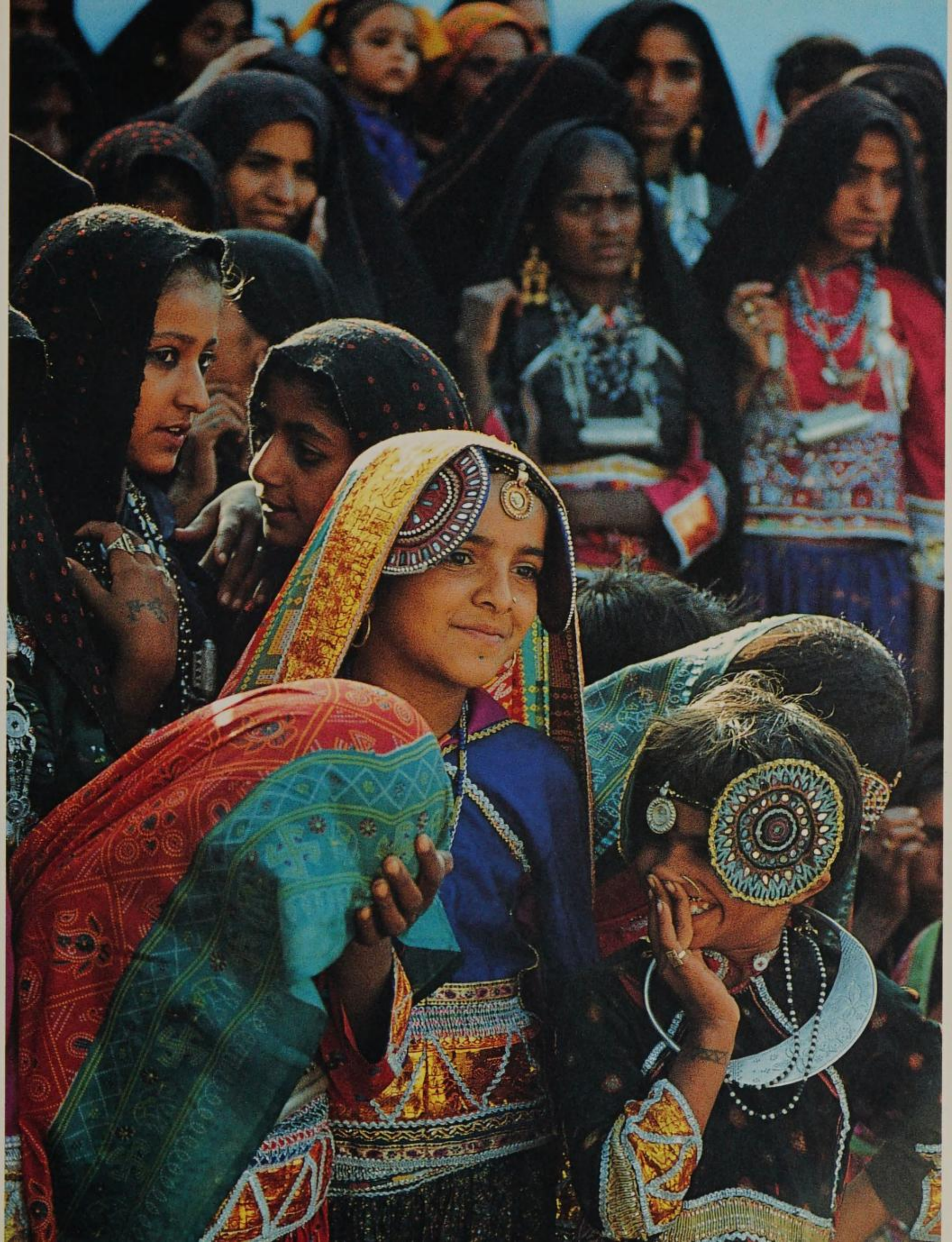
Many fortified villages still dot the landscape. Fatehgadh was fortified by Fateh Muhammad and was one of the most prosperous villages of Vagad. Gedi is believed to be one of the oldest towns of Kachchh and is one of the places that claim to have given shelter to the Pandavas. It is also said to be the capital of the mythical Raja Gadhesinh, who, according to legend, though for a time forced to wear the form of an ass, succeeded in marrying the chief's daughter and surrounded the city with a wall of brass. Some of the ass, *gadhaya*, coins have been found in the ruins. It has many temples and a well, the waters of which are reputed to have medicinal properties. Bela was an important village on an earlier land trade route to Sindh and even today has a village fort in good condition. Another important village in the Vagad area is that of Rav which has, on the banks of a large pond, a temple of Ravechi Mata, built in 1821. The Pandavas are associated with the history of this village also. At the corner of the temple courtyard wall is a memorial stone with an inscription dated 1271 A.D.. The village of Adesar is on one of the two main entrances to Kachchh. Its ruined walls, to this day, show traces of the severe bombardment inflicted by Rao Bharmalji in 1816.

Chitrod is another historic village in the Vagad area. It has the ruins of four temples and a reservoir built earlier by the Kathis. About two kilometers to the east are the remains of a Kathi town with the ruins of a small temple. At Chobari, in 1783, the army of the Maharaja of Jodhpur was totally defeated by Fateh Ali Talpur of Sindh. The scene of the fight is marked by a long line of memorial stones of the vanquished Rajputs. The western and southern parts of Kachchh are also full of village forts, some in good condition, others dilapidated. Tera, was once the fiefdom of Jam Hamirji and has a fort, *durbargadh*, with exquisite wall paintings of the Ramayana legend. The Gajod fort is in ruins but its location is impressive. Other village forts still visible are at Wanki, Patri, Sanosara, Pundi, Bhachau, Vandia and Gadhshisha. The deserted Roha fort has a spectacular location. Of the walled towns only Mundra is substantially within its earlier boundaries and still a bit like what it must have been in times before. In contrast to these historic villages, the Gandhidham township near Kandla port and the Kandla Free Trade Zone are the modern urban centres of Kachchh, bustling with manufacturing and trading activities.

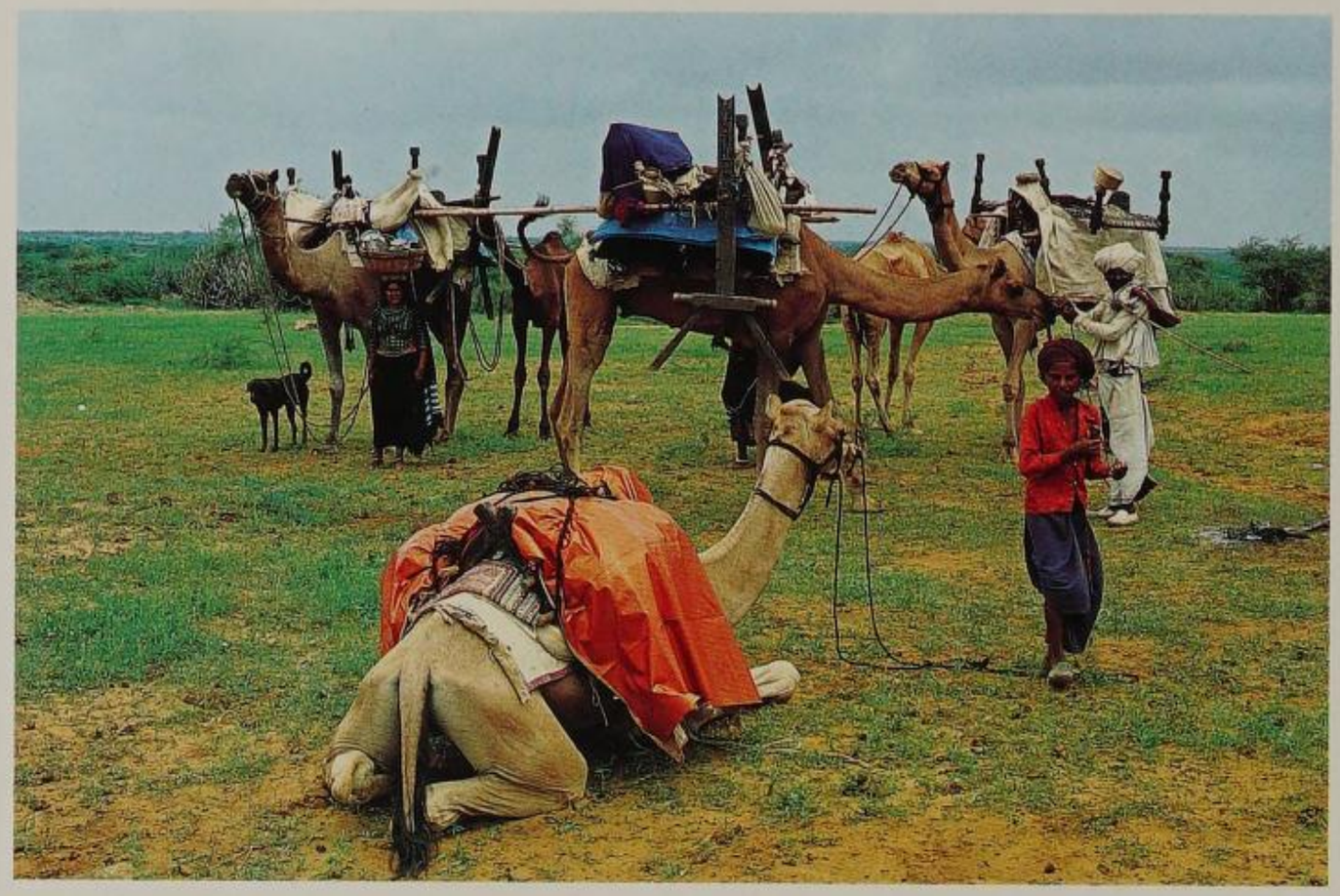
North of Bhuj is the Great Rann of Kachchh, awe-inspiring in its remote, endless stretch. It has many moods and appearances which change from dawn to dusk. Salt crystals dazzle like millions of diamonds under the scorching sun. Its still vastness is eerie under the bluish glow of the full moon. During a thunderstorm at night it flashes brilliantly with lightning. Its mystery is deepened by fantastic mirages, much different from those seen in an ordinary desert. The land is stark. At places there is not a blade of grass as far as the eye can see and then all of a sudden there is a magnificent transition as the Rann marshes meet with lush grass and dark cliffs at Kala Dungar or Khadir. The rock of Bhanjda Bet stands in it in silent silhouette. Sprawling over twenty-five thousand square kilo-



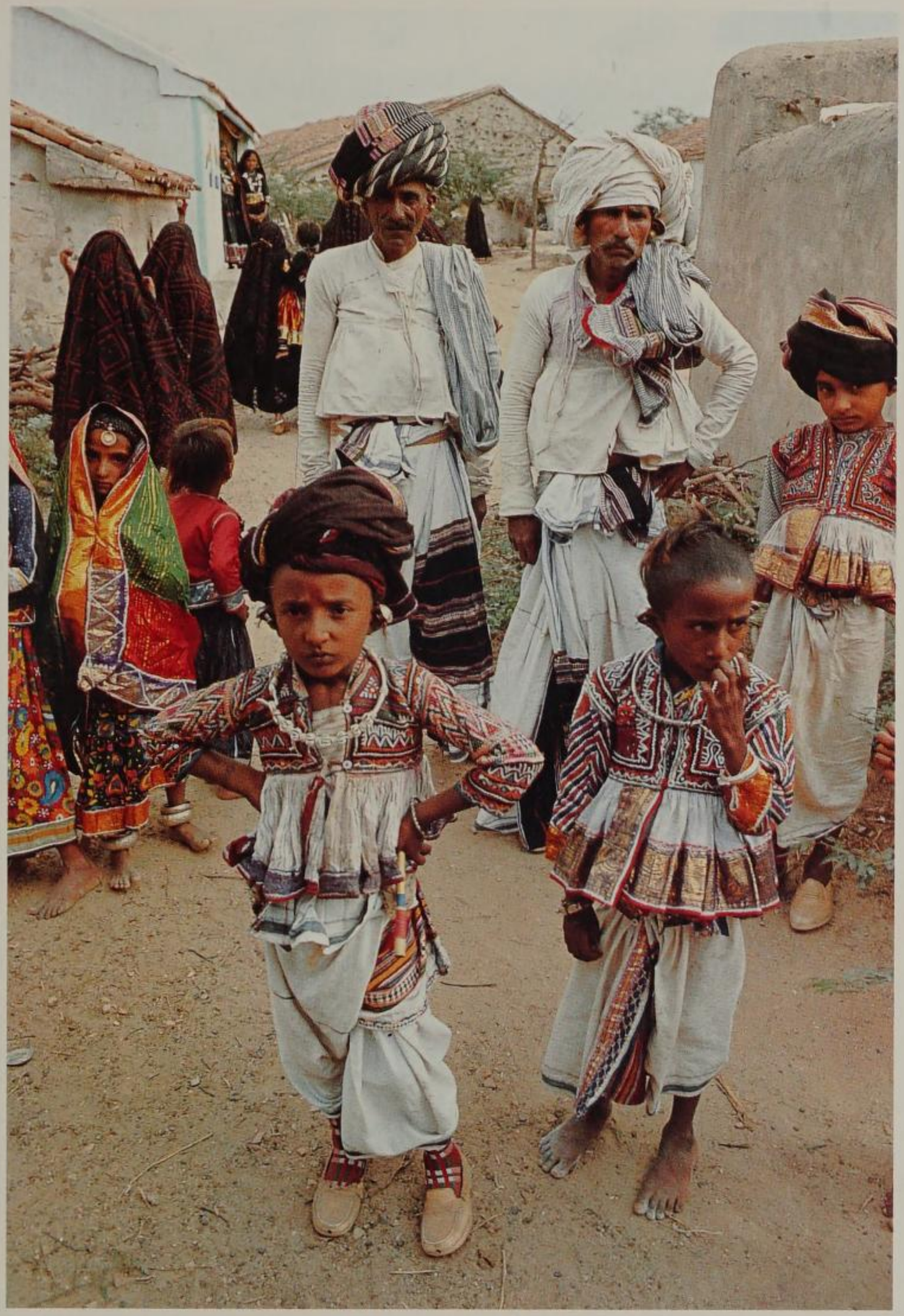
Top: Rabari bhungas, *huts. Above: The neat interior is decorated with* lippankam, *mud-work.*



Rabari girls at a village celebration.



Rabaris on the move. The men leave early with the flock and the women pack camp and follow with their laden camels.

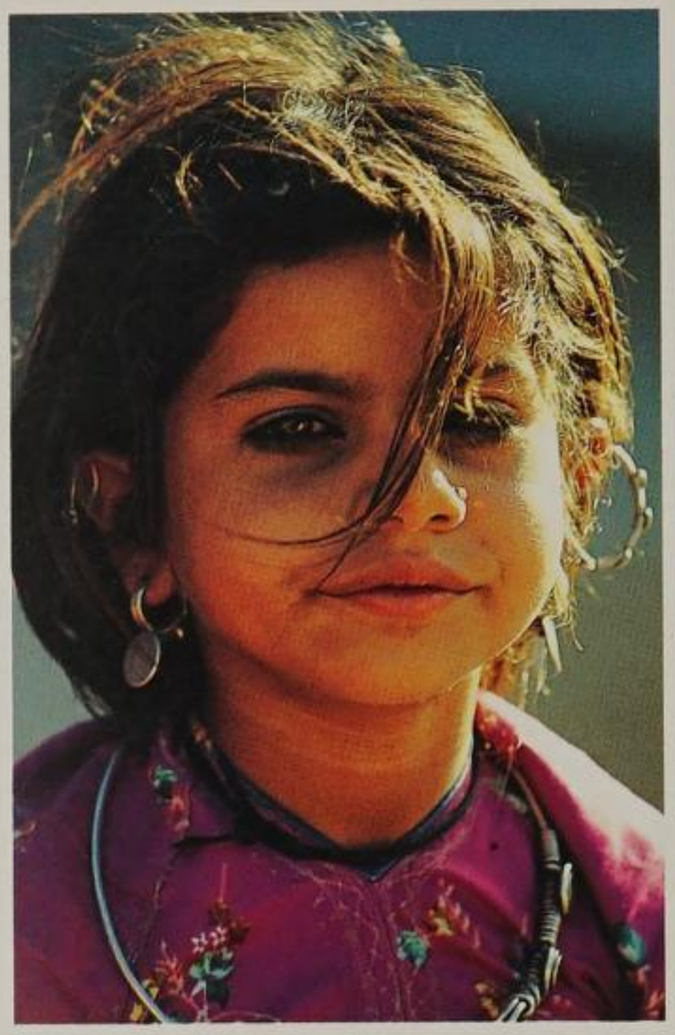


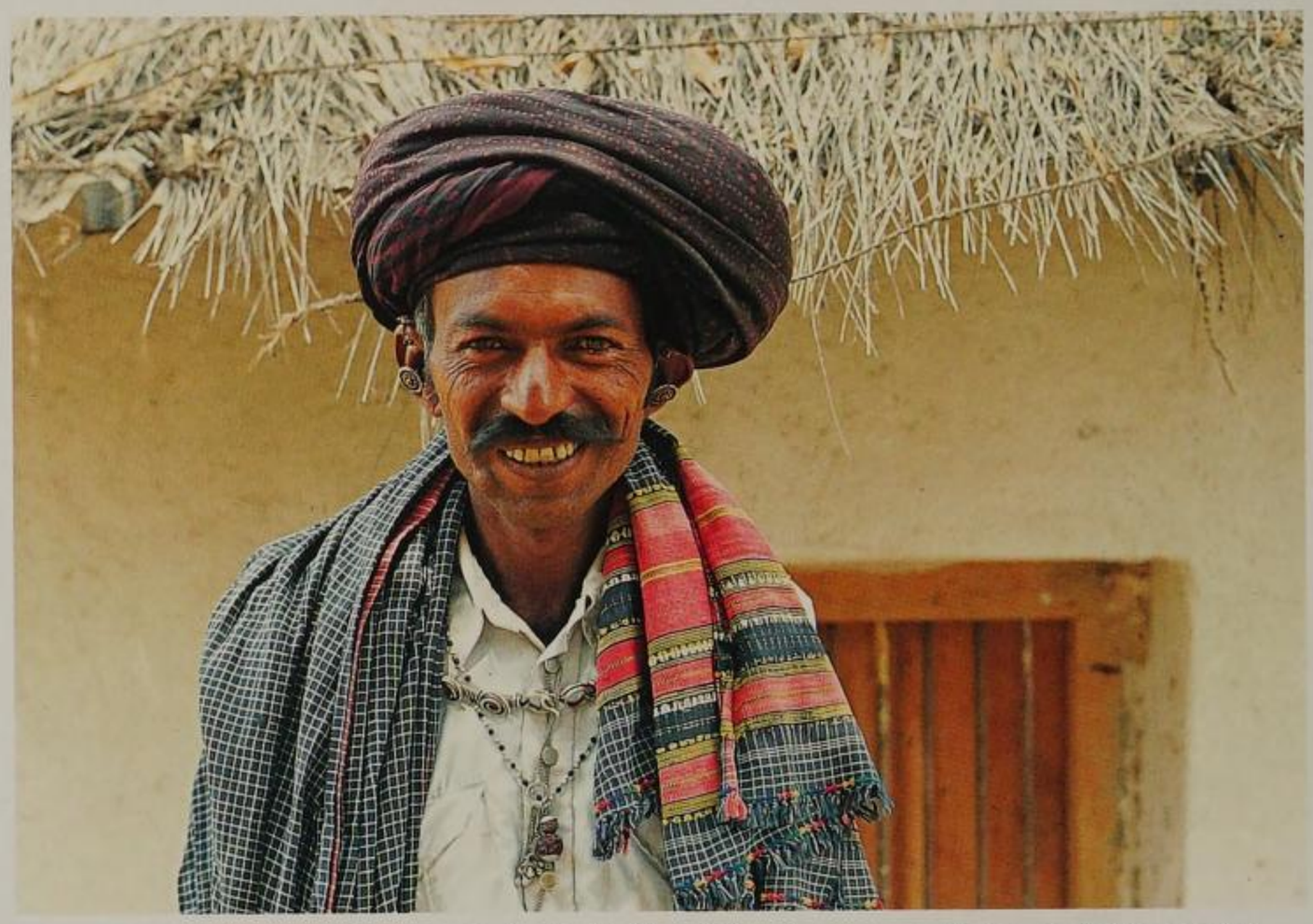
Rabari men and children. They are distinct from the Rabaris of North Gujarat and those of Rajasthan.

metres, a section of it, the Little Rann, forks into the Gulf of Kachchh. It is gradually filled by the summer winds off Lakhpat, not the tides, though a certain amount of underground seepage of seawater does take place during high tides. The summer monsoon rains flood it further and its upper reaches dry up only by the end of the year. The flood waters as they dry, leave a hard flat surface covered with stones, shingle and salt. As the summer wears on and the heat increases, the ground, baked and blistered by the sun, shines with large traits of salt with a dazzling whiteness. "No one enters it except for inducements of trade or necessities of military duty," mentions the Gazetteer, and armies have got lost in it, including that of Feroze Shah Tughlak. One comes across half-buried bones of dead animals which glow eerily at night. After the cacophony of urban sounds, it is a pleasure to hear the sounds of silence in the Great Rann. Even if one has seen it dozens times, a fresh encounter never fails to impress. It is a great place for spending time with oneself. This is the best part of Kachchh-inanimate.

It could be that the Rann was a navigable river, perhaps the Indus itself. The Rann is also responsible for giving Kachchh the great climate it has. From the extended south coast of Kachchh comes the pleasant sea breeze but its humidity is drawn out by the Rann, with its salt deposits, acting as a giant, natural, desiccator. Seismic disturbances further changed its course, the last one being in 1819, which resulted in the Allah Bund in the Great Rann. In all probability, as evident from its enormous width, it could be the bed of an arm of the sea, raised by some natural convulsion above its original level and cut off from the ocean. There are local traditions of seaports on its edges, including the famous Harappan settlement of Dholavira, now under excavation.

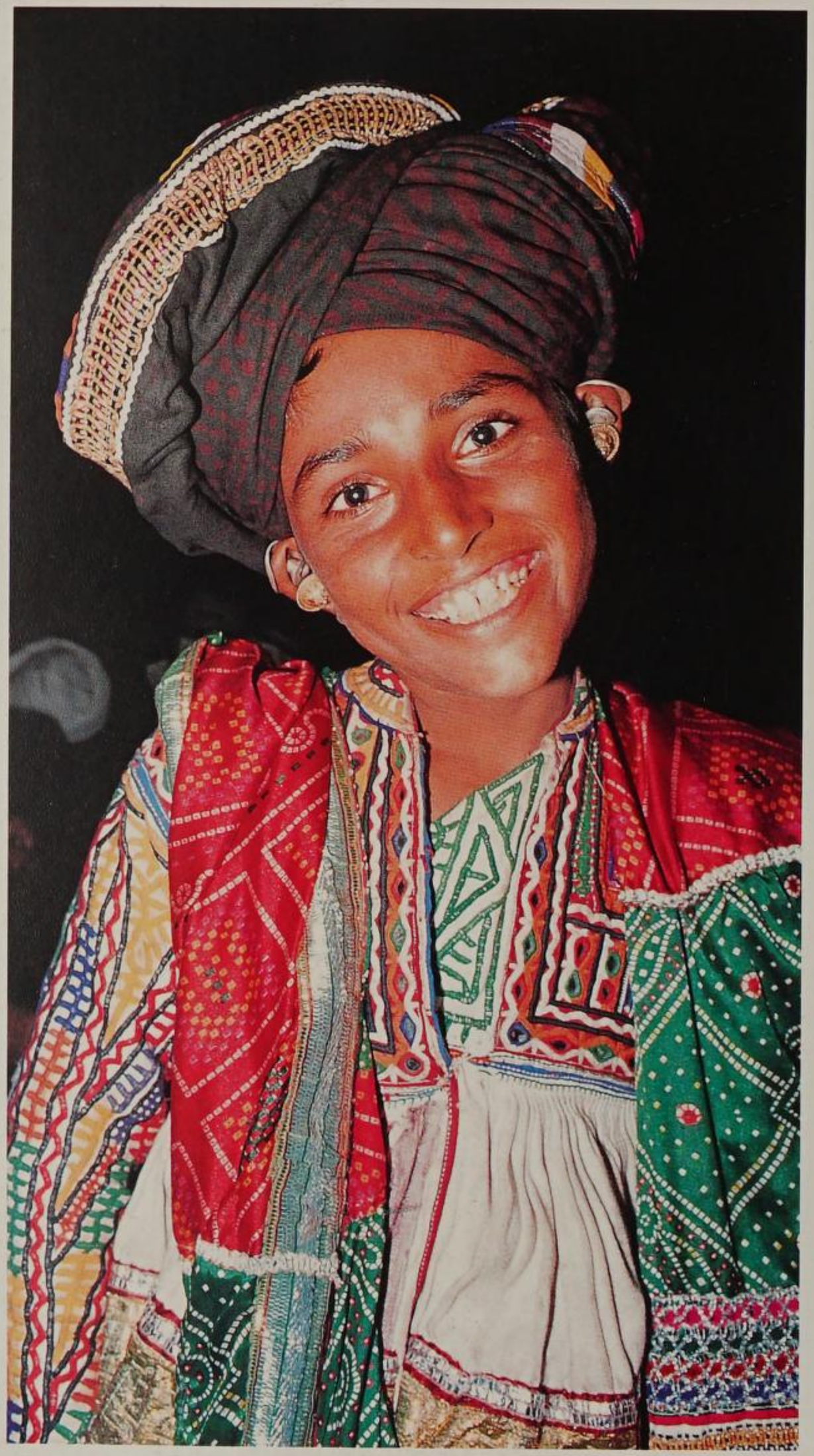
Short of the Rann is the great pastureland of Banni, now choked with the growth of ganda babal, *prosopis juliflora.* Banni was earlier a part of the Rann itself but over the

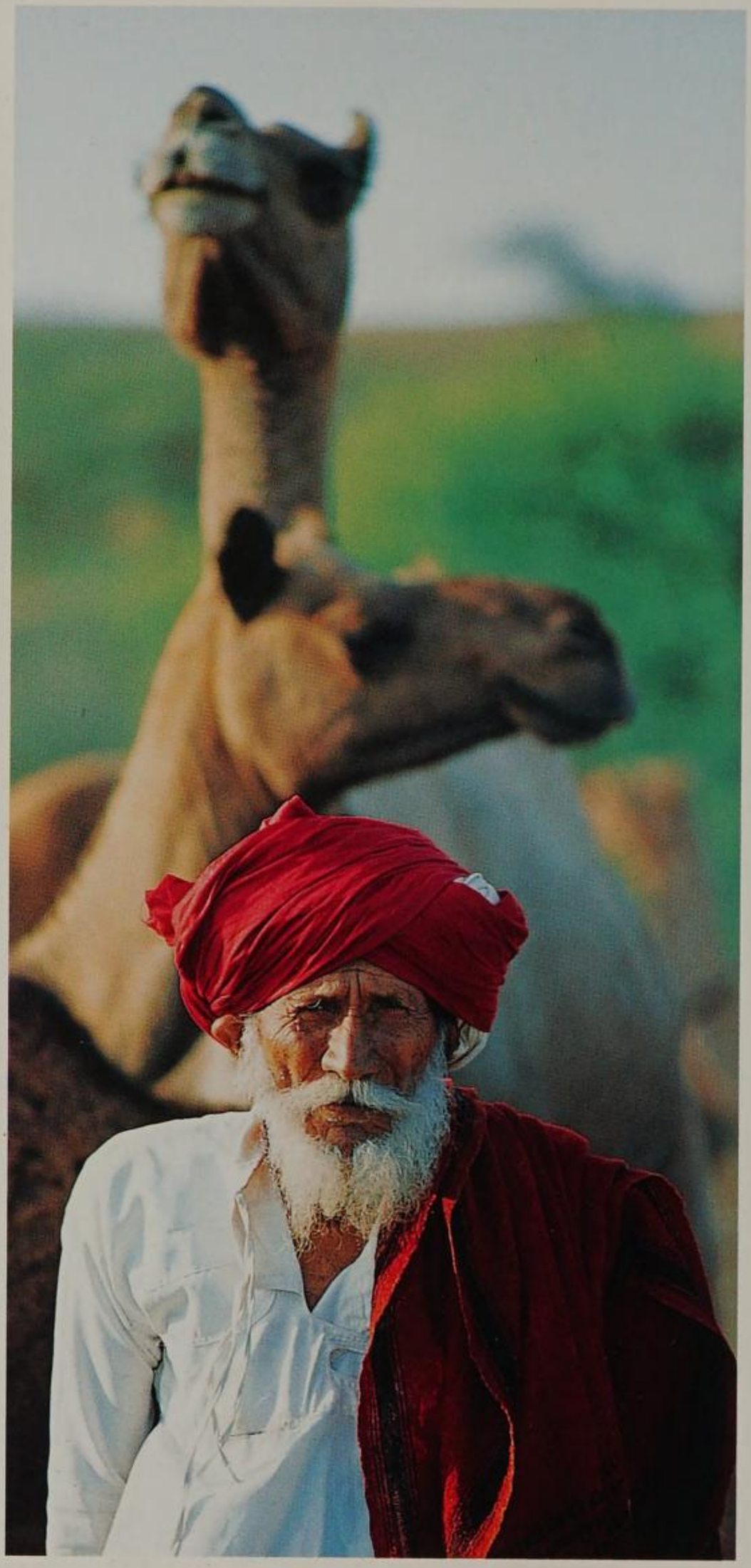




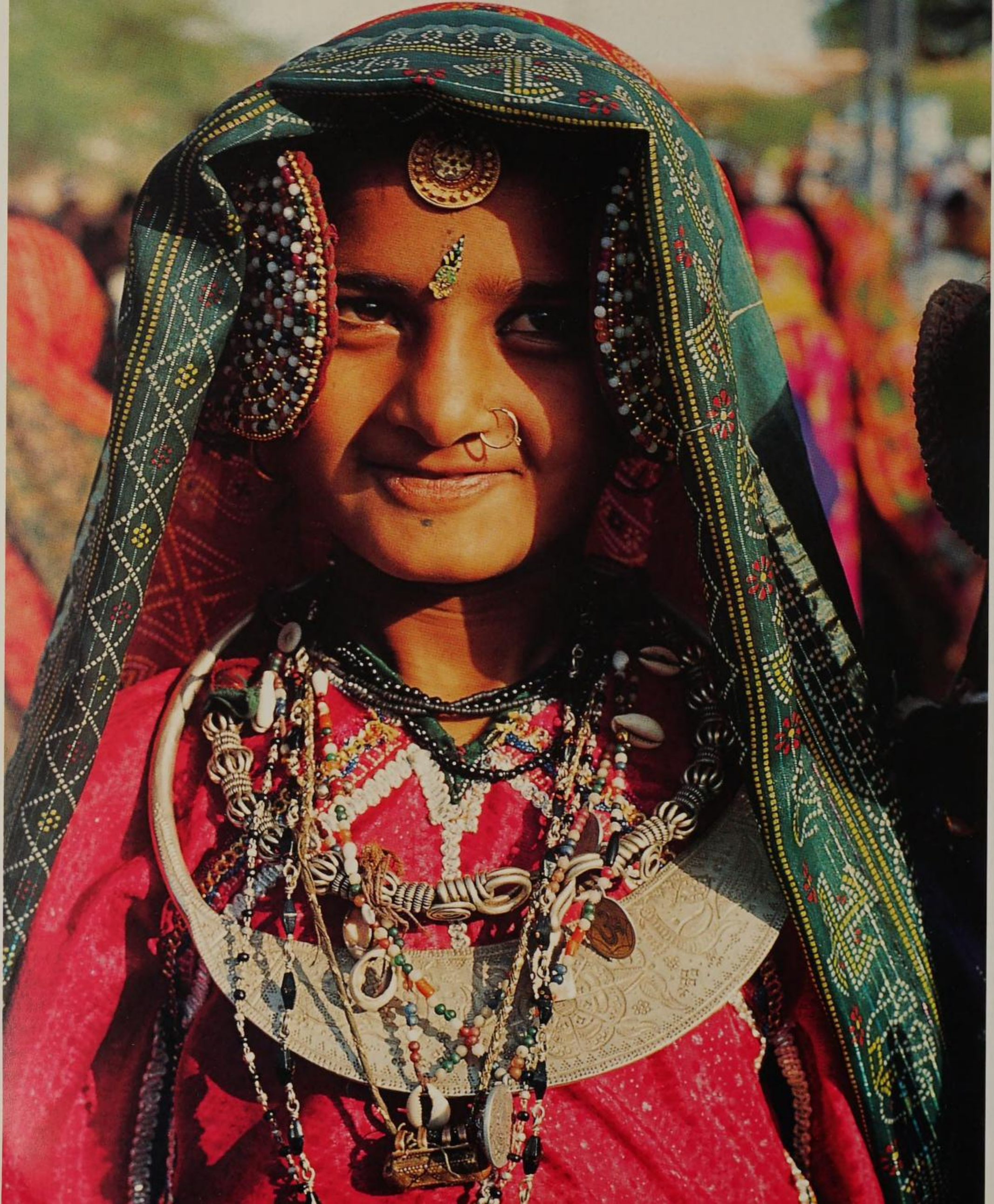
Left: Rabari bridegroom. Left, top: Rabari girl. Top: Rabari women on their way to the market. Above: Rabari Sarpanch of Sanosara.

A group of Rabari elders.





Above: A Rabari boy in his finery at a fair. Right: A Rabari elder at a camel market. Following page: Rabari women and children. Their main sub-groups in Kachchh are the Kachchhela, Garasia and Wagadia, with distinctive dress and ornamentation.

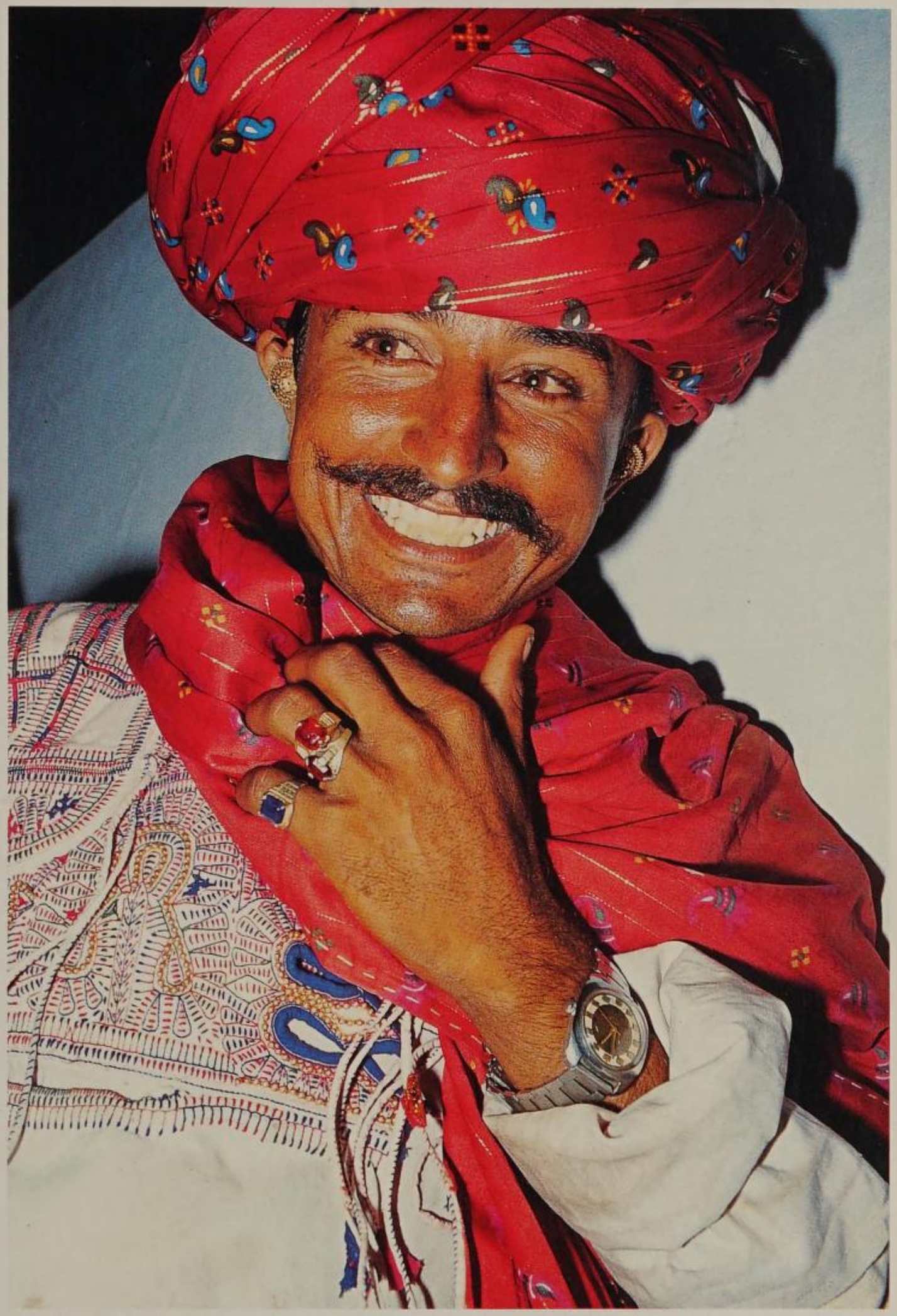


years was reclaimed by the sedimentation of alluvial soil brought by the north-flowing rivers during the monsoon floods. In it are are over fifty settlements of pastoralists and no agriculture. Years ago, a Collector with foresight had banned the entry of sheep and goats in the Banni, to prevent them from degrading it.

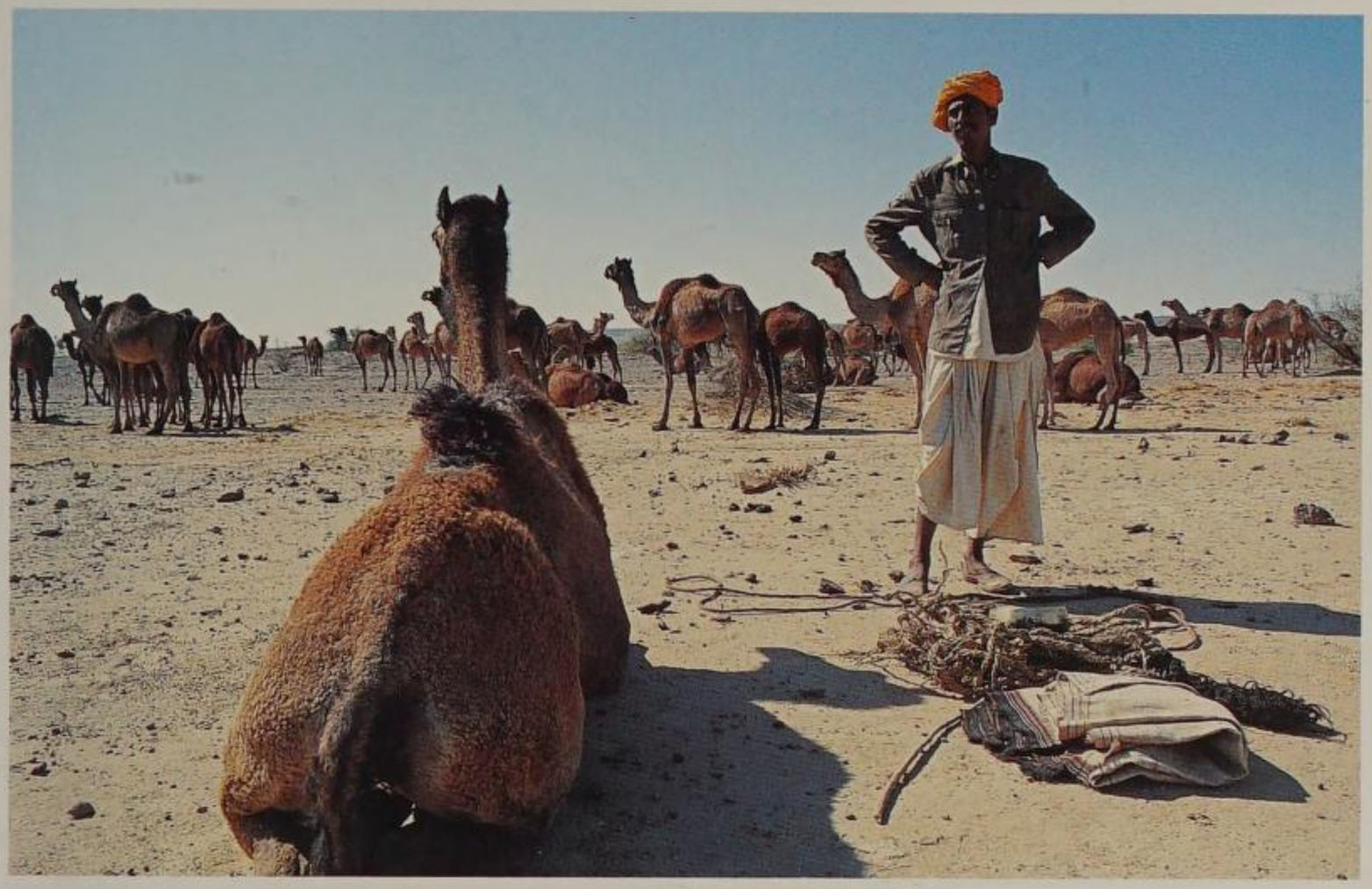
Further north is the Kala Dungar or the Black Mountain, an area which is also unique in its terrain. The main town of the area is Khavda and villages are situated in the many folds of the mountain. There is an interesting account of this area in the Kachchh Gazetteer. "It came into the possession of the Raos of Kutch under rather curious circumstances. It is said that on the birth of Prince Desal I (1718-41) the Sammas of Pachham, anxious to show their filial loyalty, offered the Rao as much land as a cart coming from Bhuj could traverse in one day. The Sammas would seem to have miscalculated the distance, as the cart passed through Sadhara, Andhau, Khari, Godpar, Ludia and Khavda, and it was only by bribing the driver to stop that some part of their *beyt* (Pachham) was left in their possession."

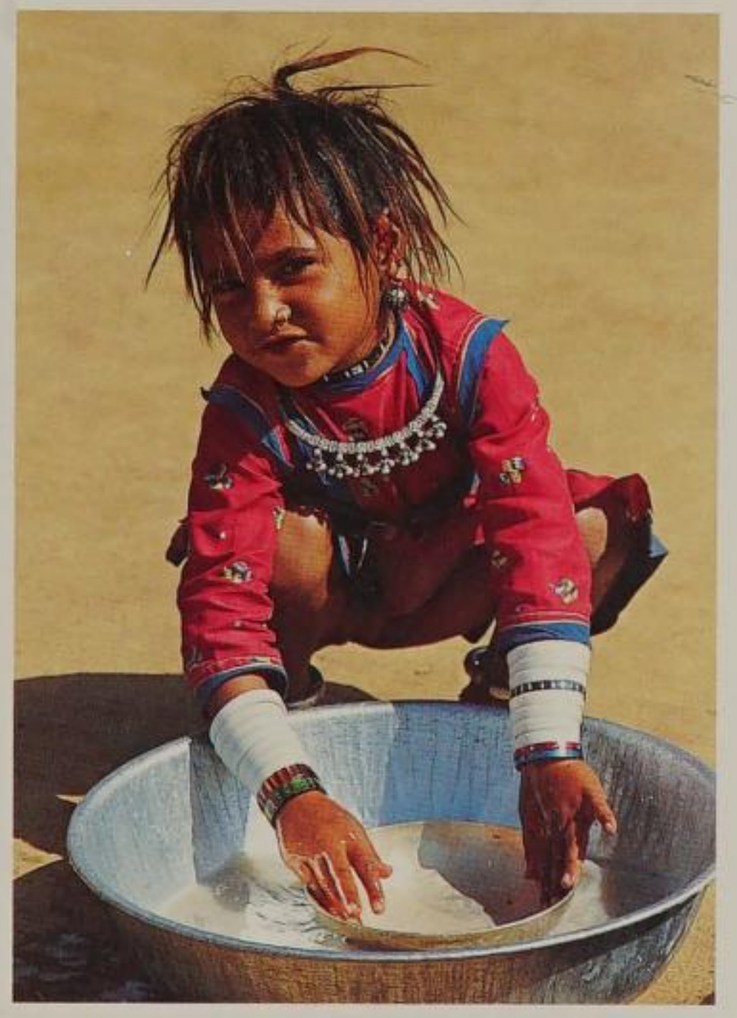
Many areas of Kachchh have interesting landscapes, with combinations of low hills, mountains, dust-coloured ridges and rocky cliffs which rise abruptly. The important ranges are those of Jhura, Dhola, Habai, Khadir, Chadva, Nara and Pachham. Being younger than the Himalayas, the ranges are rich with fossil remains. The more interesting individual peaks which have distinctive features are the dome-shaped Nanama and the Bhanjda rock in the Rann north-west of Khadir, the flat-topped Gadipadar and Gandhri, the tabular and steep-sided Varar, the conical Vichhia, the fossil rich Kero hill, Kala Dungar, (Black Hill) and its trailing Gora Dungar (White Hill), the flat Palkhiari along the Dhand, the sandstone Jhandaria, and the hilly islands, Chorad, Khadir and Bela.

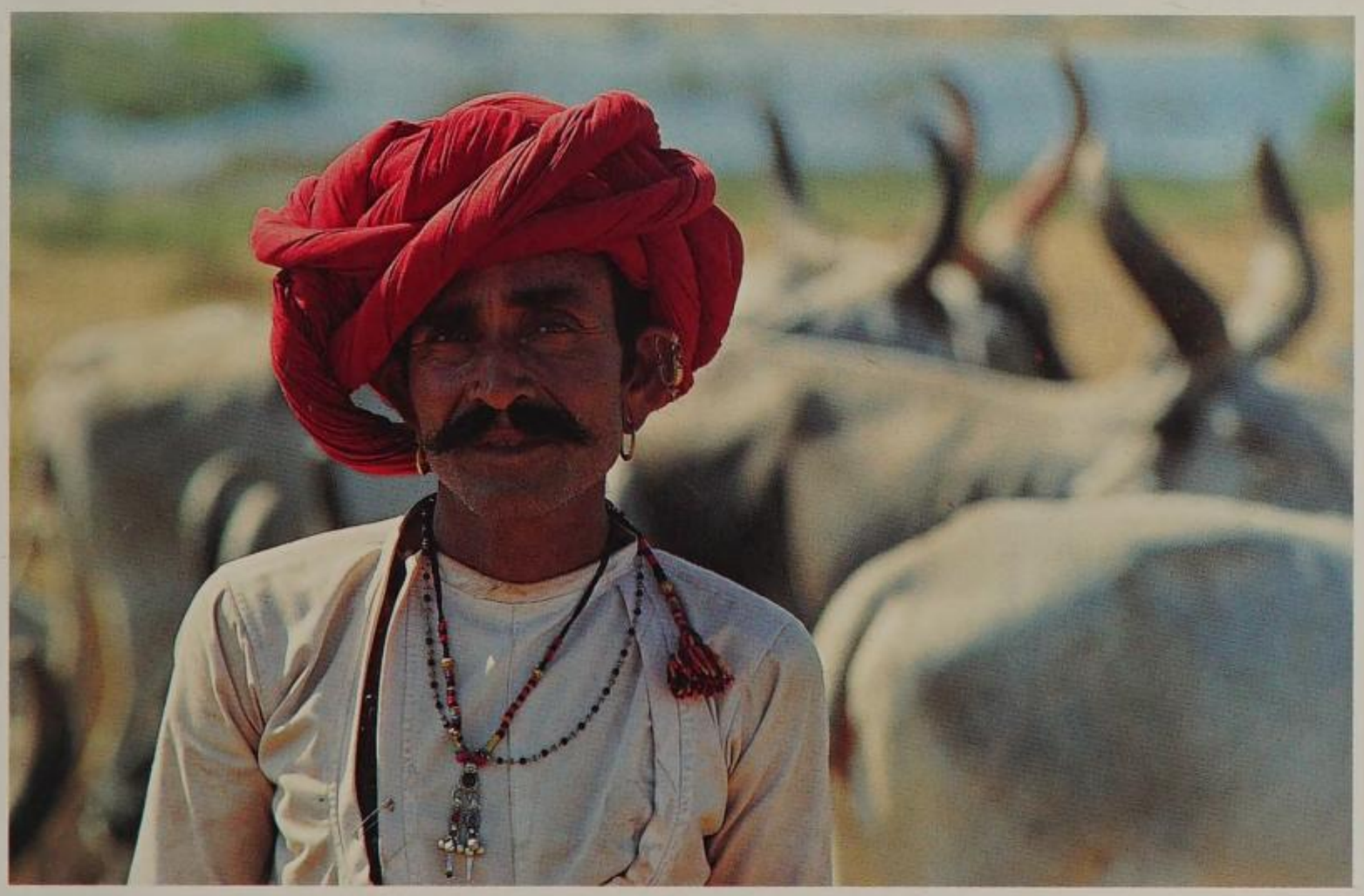
It was on top of the fabulous Kachchh volcano, Dhinodhar, that the revered saint

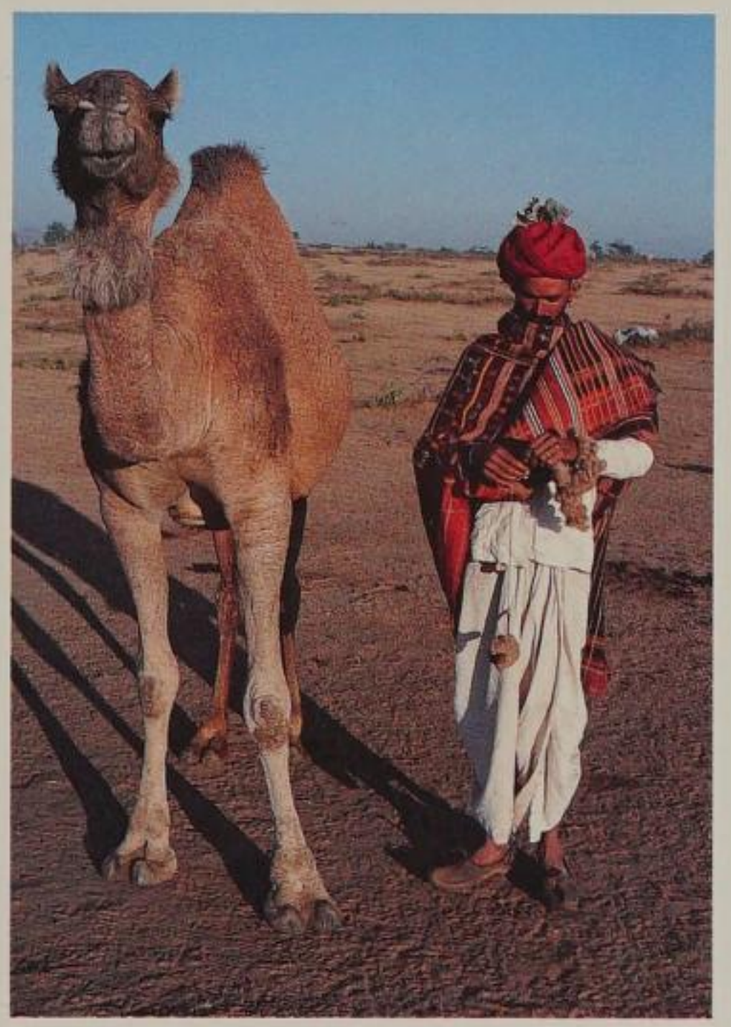


Left: Rabari girl and (above) youth. Printed, imitation bandhni *textiles are replacing the genuine tie and dye craft and artificial material is taking the place of silk.*

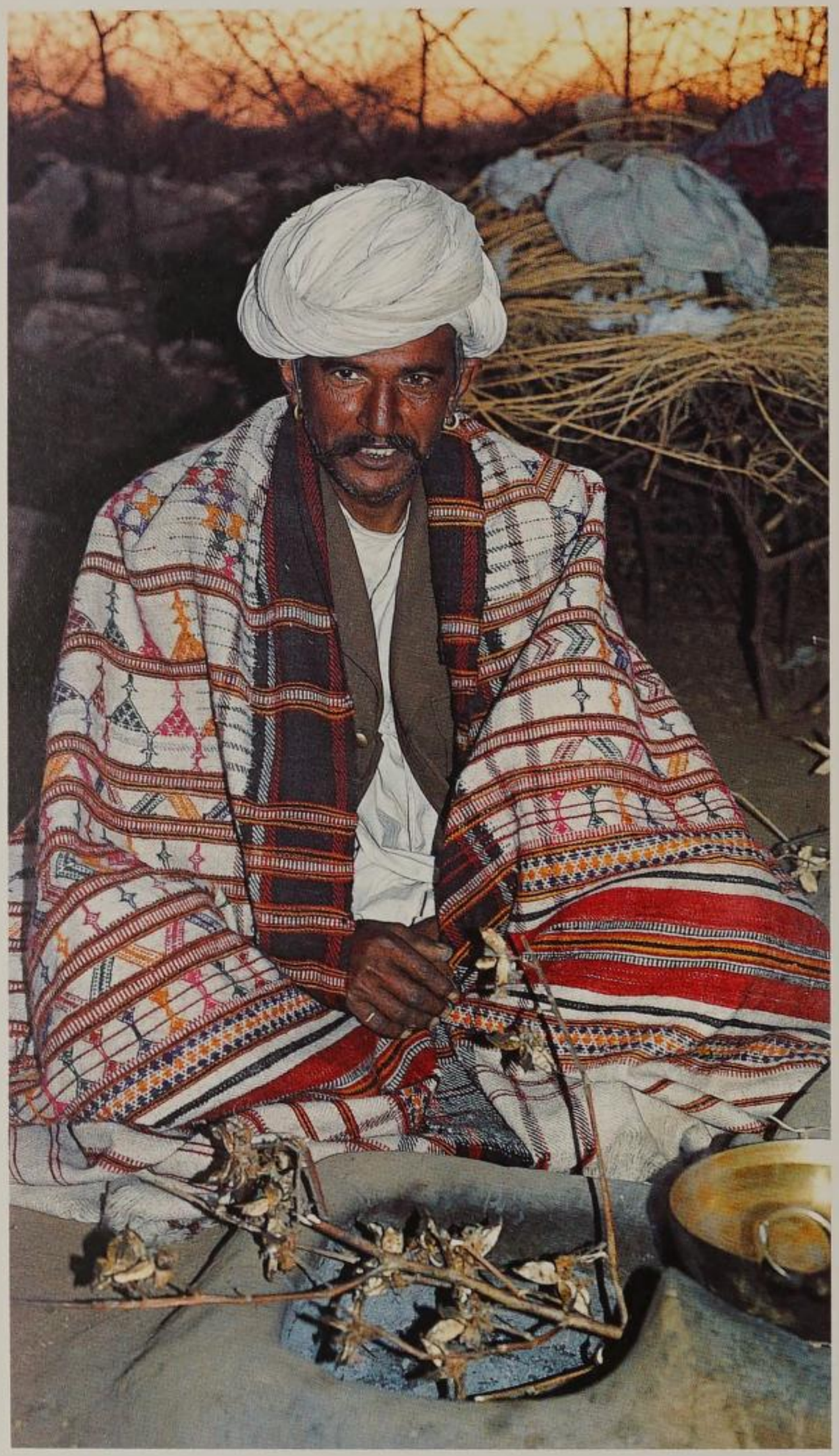


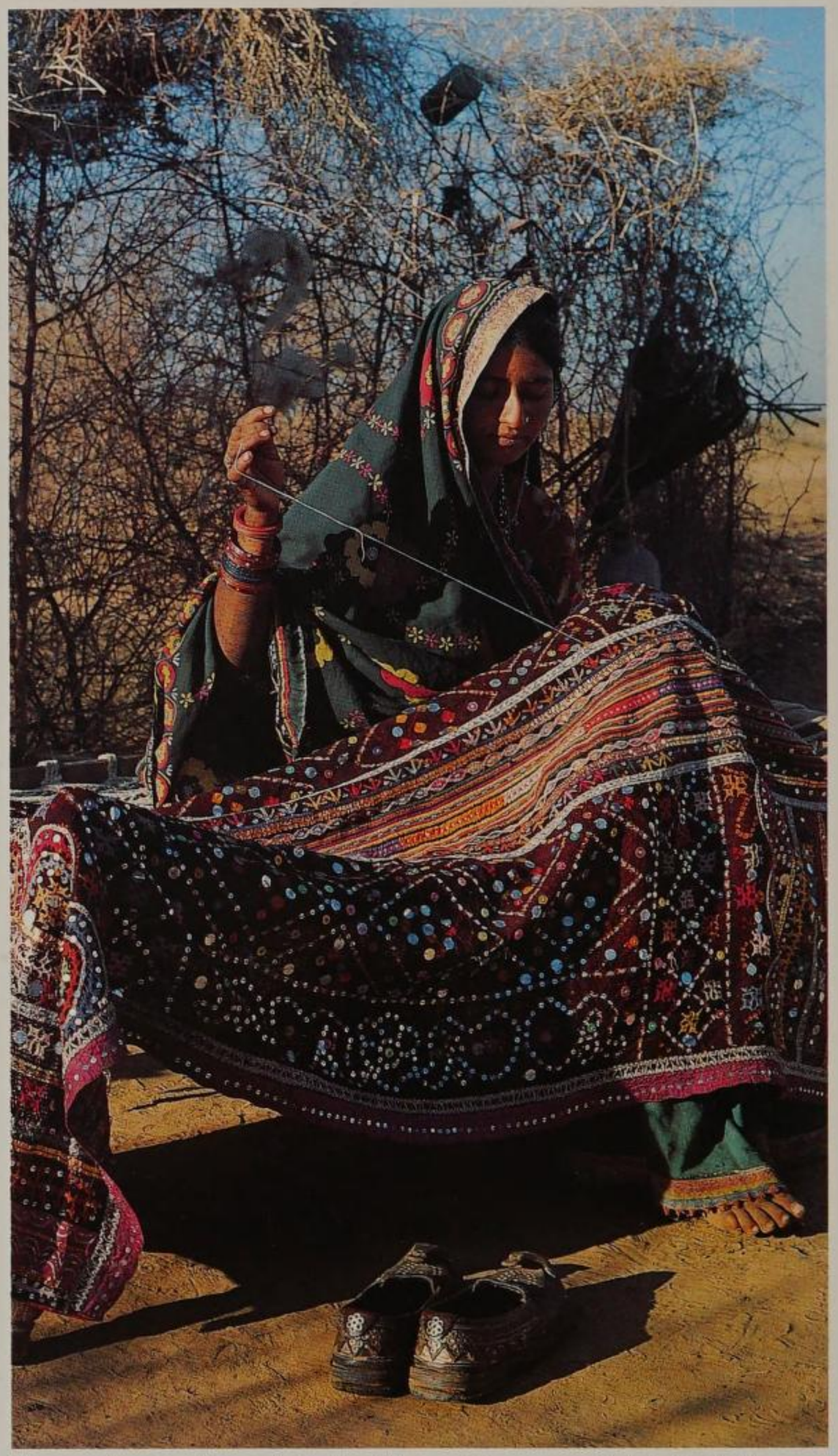




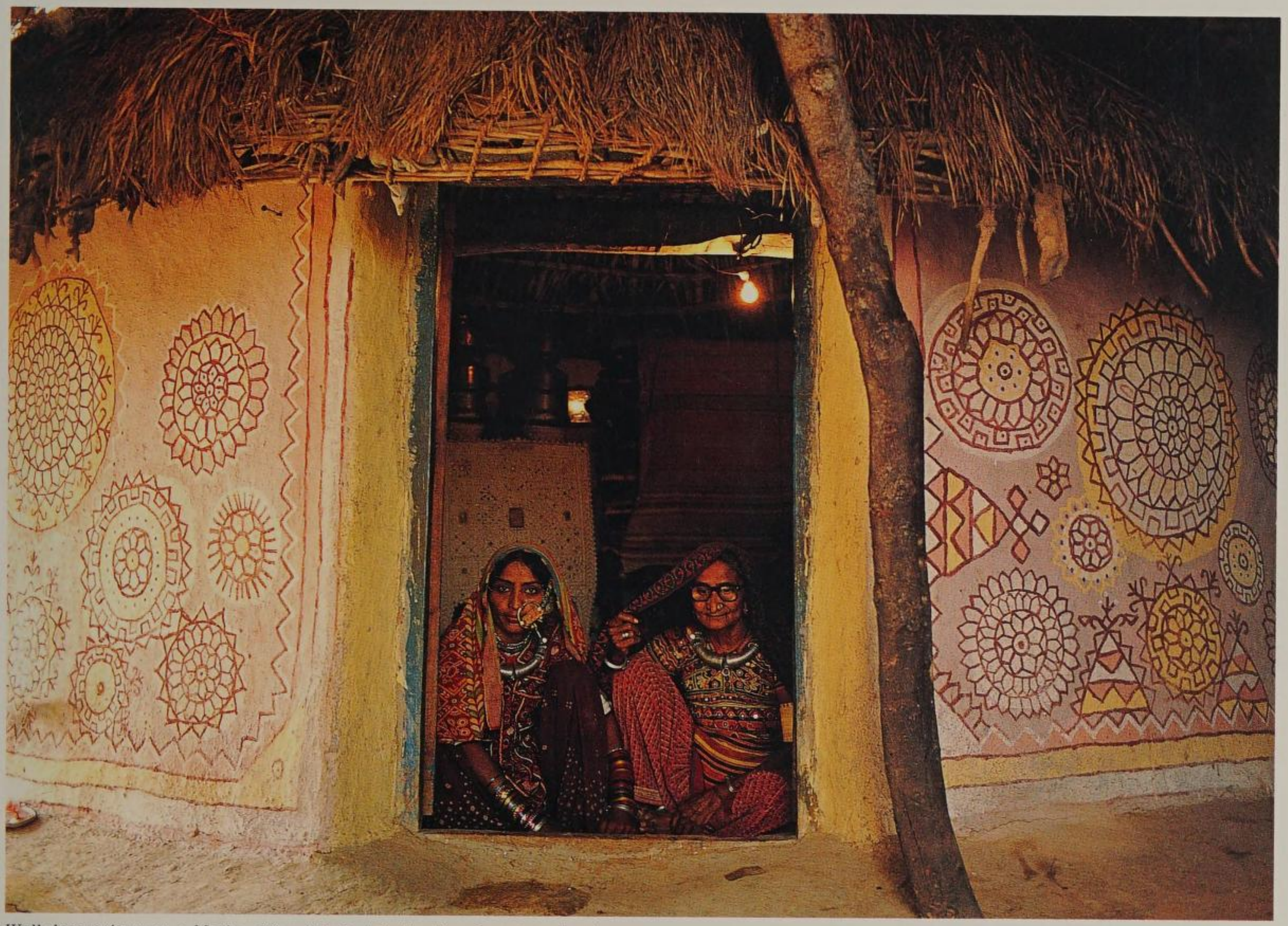


Distant cousins of Kachchhi Rabaris, Rabaris of Northern Gujarat and the Rabaris of Rajasthan, some of whom have settled down in Kachchh in Lakhpat taluka.

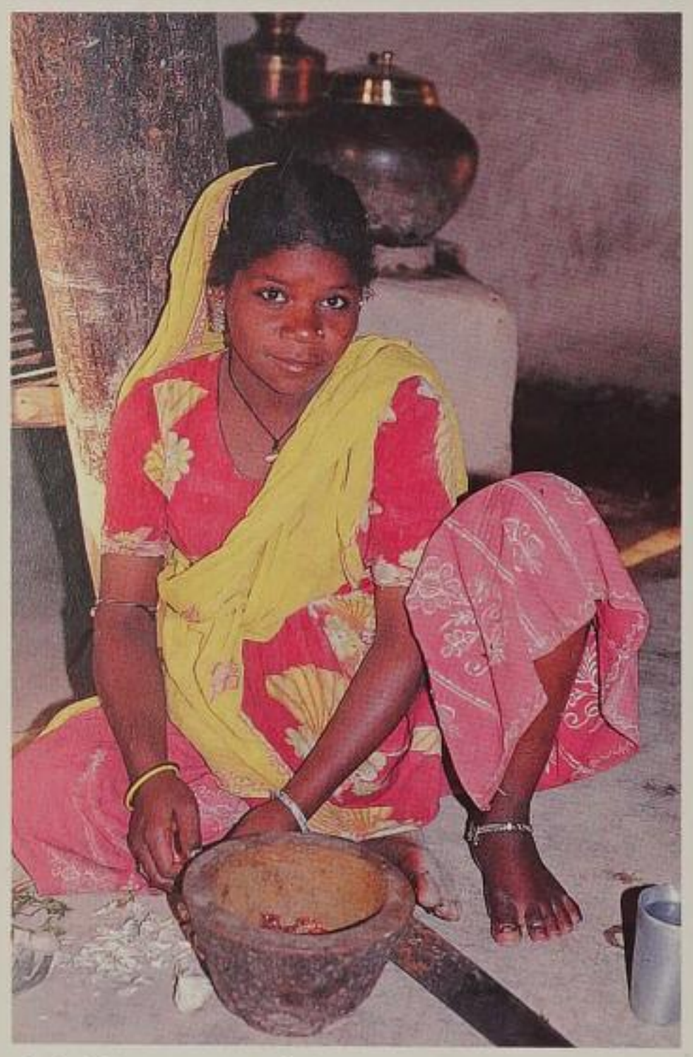




Bharwad pastoralists, originally of Saurashtra, now settled in Kachchh.



Wall decorations on a Meghwal family's hut in the Banni pasture land.



A Siddi woman of Bhuj.

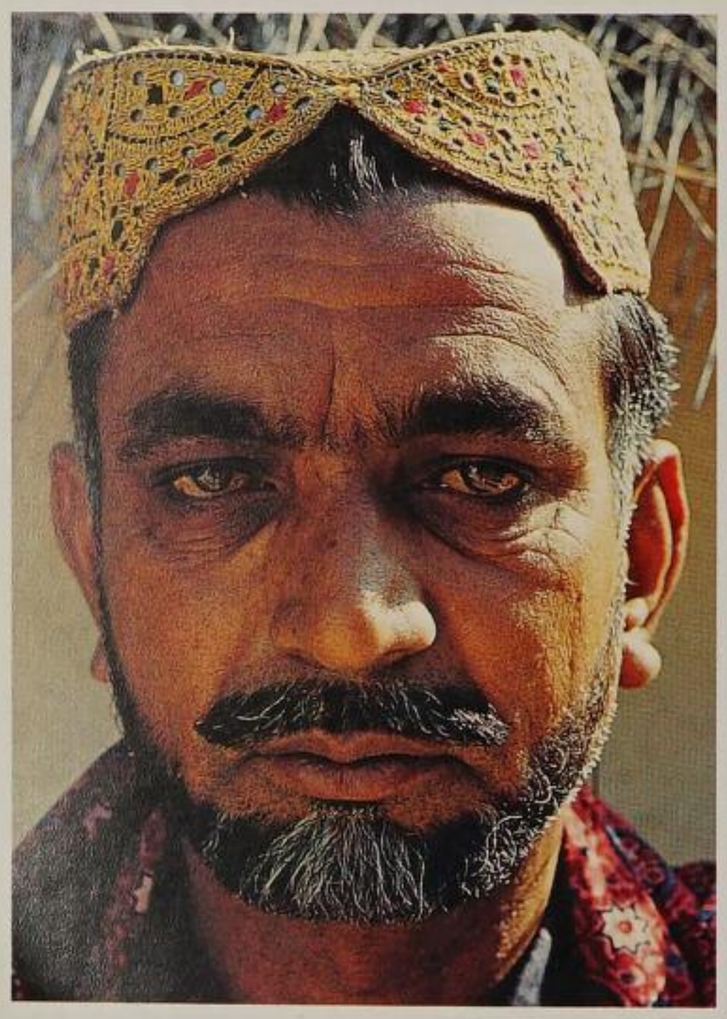
Left, above and right: The Sodha community. Their settlements have come up in the western and northern plains of Kachchh.

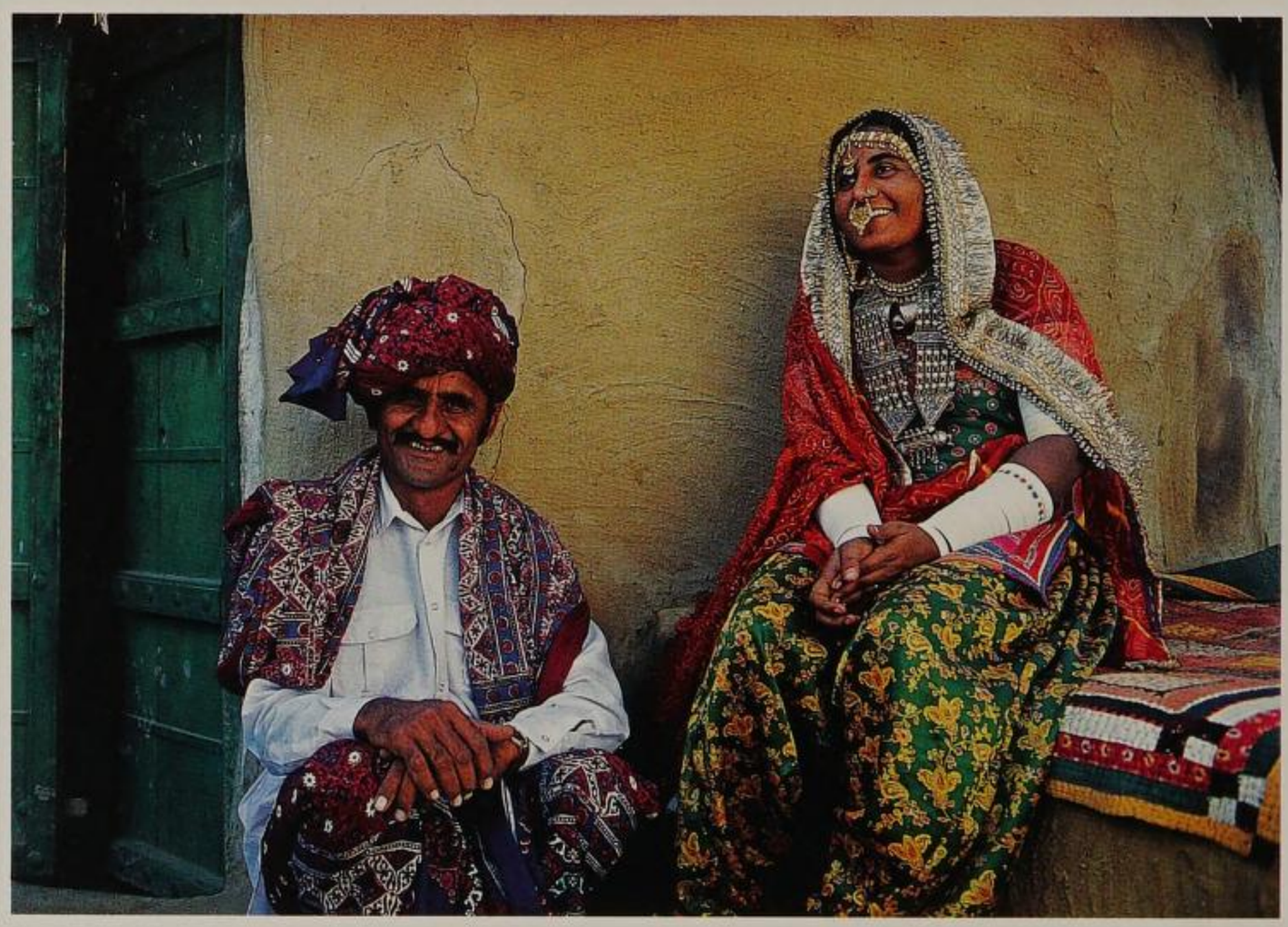
Dhoramnath did a twelve-year penance, resting upside down with his head on a betel-nut, a Charan woman feeding him with milk. He did the penance to repent for his destruction of Ryan (said to be the earlier location of Mandvi) where he was troubled by the residents. Travelling north from there he started to climb the highest hill he could see but it became Nanao, weighed down, with his sin. He chose another hill, but for it too the burden was too great and it became Jhurio, broken down. He chose a third hill and climbed it backwards. It bore him and he called it Dhinodhar, the patience bearer. Some hills near Punvaro-no-gadh, associated with the seventy-two Jakhs and their sister Sayari, who vanquished the cruel ruler Punvar, are known relatedly. They get their names from their quaking before Jakh (Yaksh) and his brethren – Nanao the sinker, Dhrabvo the shaker, Lakhadiyo the unstable and Addho Chini, the cleft. Another hill was called Kakadbit after the youngest of the seventy-two Jakh brothers.

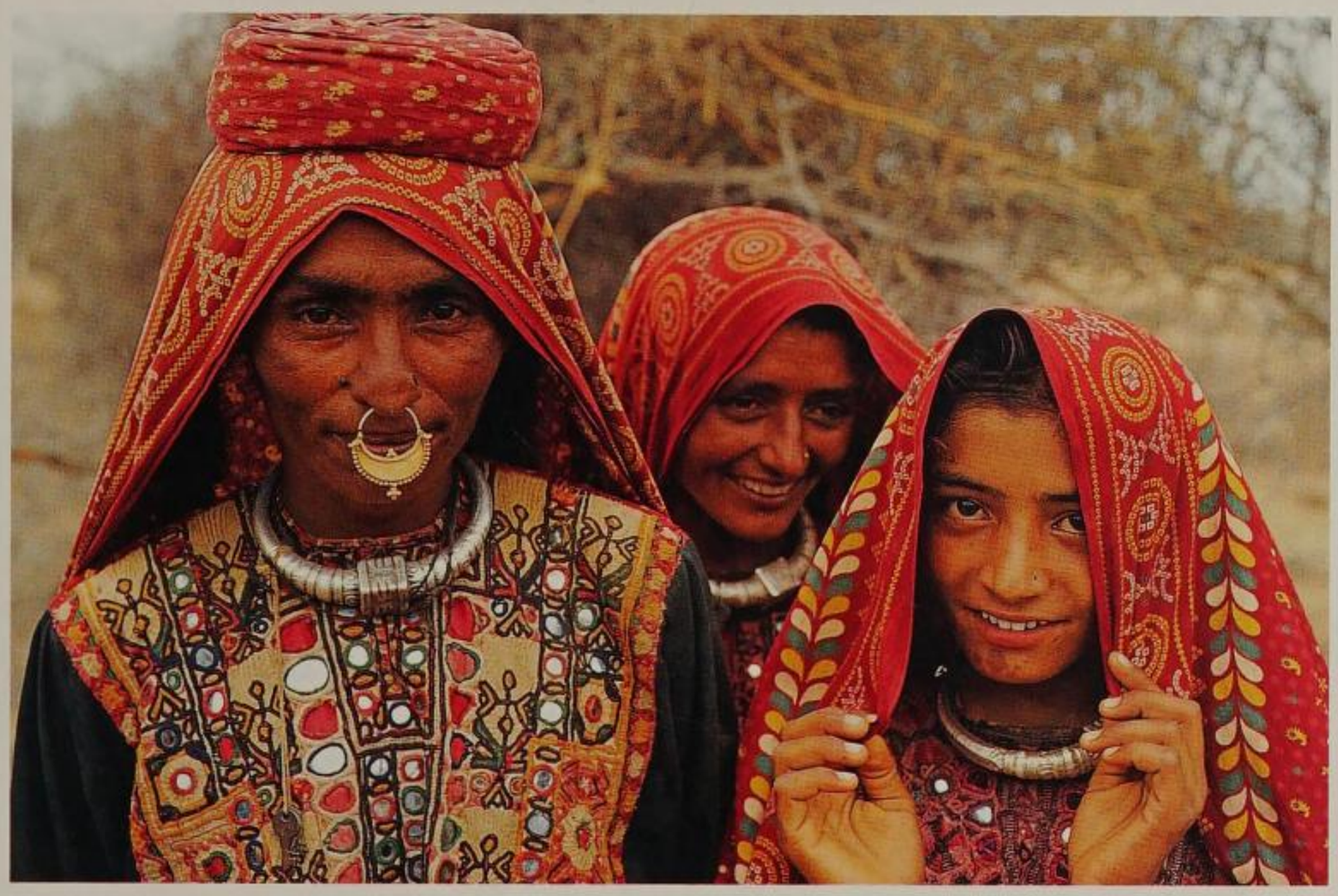
The various hills have subtle shades due to their geological constituents, including ferruginous beds, limestone, aluminous rock, Jurassic shales and stones. They are excellent for navigating nomads and on a clear day a person lost in the Banni can easily get his bearings from Kero, Dhinodhar, Jhura and Kala Dungar. Many powerful streams rush down their sides during the monsoon rains, when they do come. The streams are not as tame as their beds make them appear to be when they are dry. It is said that in 1764, after defeating the Kachchhis, the Sindh ruler Ghulam Shah Kalora had, out of spite, constructed an earthen dam and diverted the waters of the earlier flow of the Indus, in the present area of the Great Rann. Until then Lakhpat was a prosperous town with an annual revenue of seven to eight lakh *kories* per year. Rice used to be grown in what is now desert.

Kachchh has a long coastline of approximately three hundred and fifty kilometres. Apart from the modern port of Kandla, the traditional ports are those of Mandvi,

Huts at Dhordo, Banni.







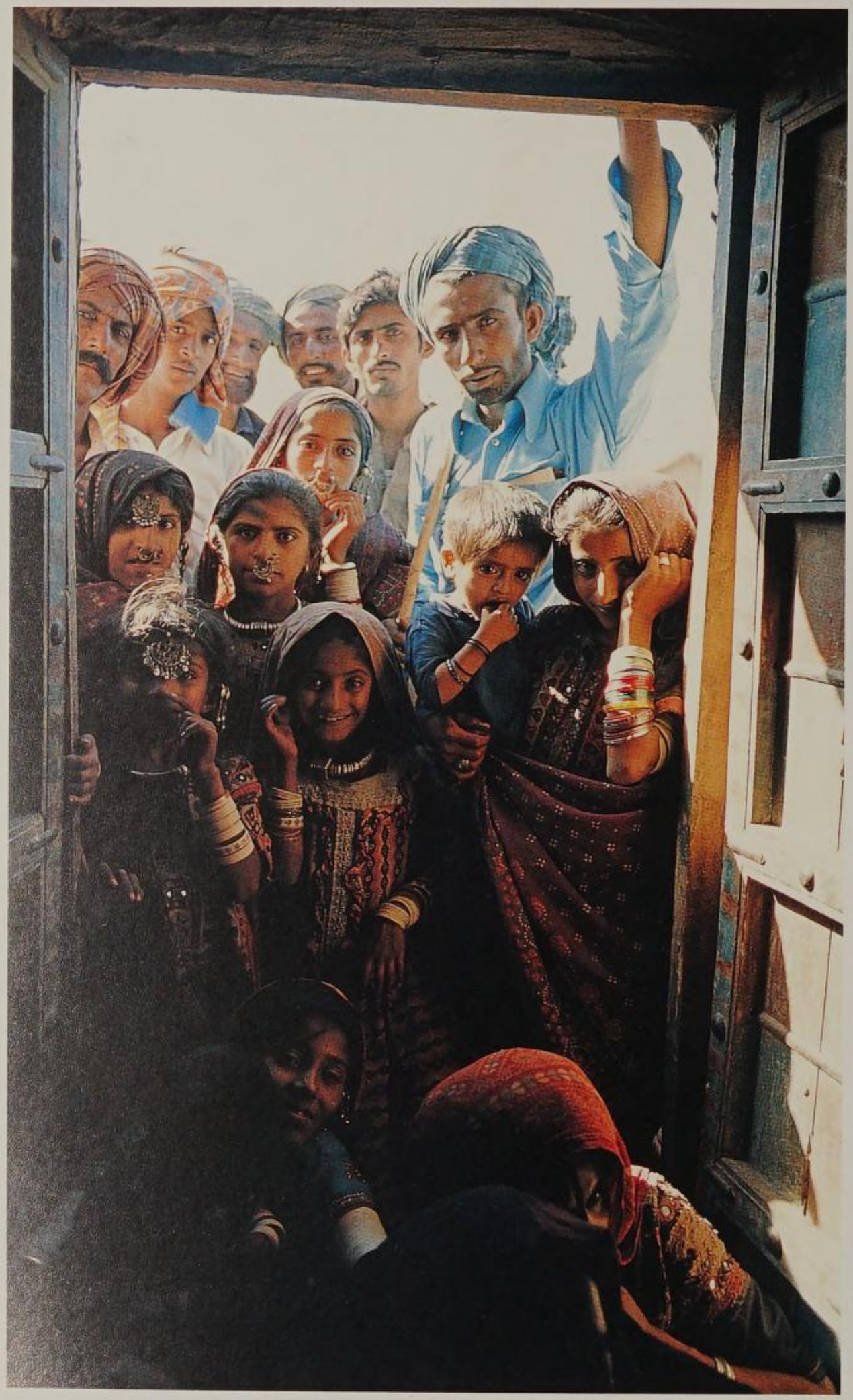
Opposite page top: Fakirani Jath children reciting religious teachings in a class at their village. Extreme left: A Fakirani Jath elder. Left: A Mutwa family at Dhordo Banni. Above: Fakirani Jath women. Top: Dhanetah Jath women.

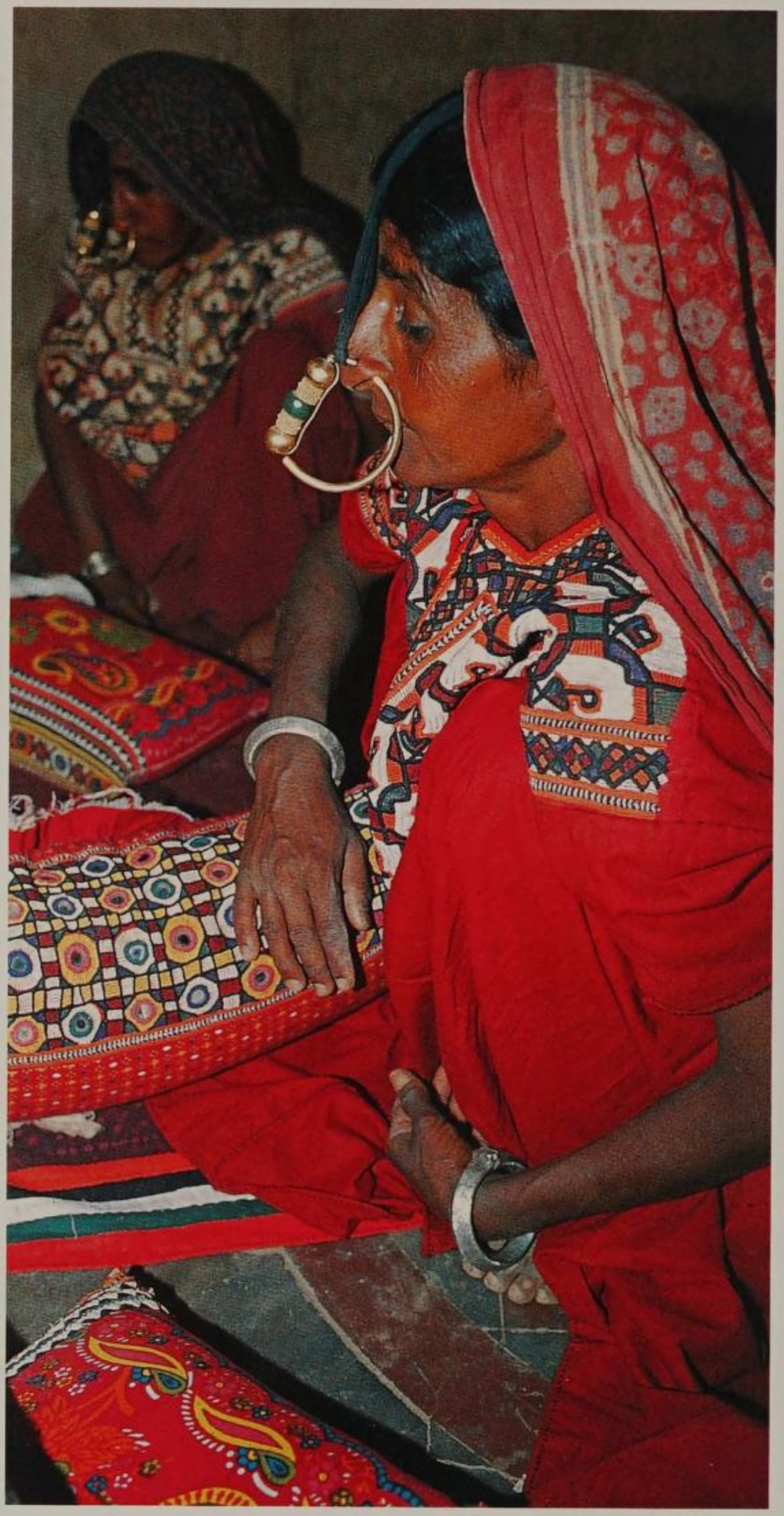
Mundra, Jakhau and Koteshwar. Lakhpat is now inactive as a port. Many excellent, navigable creeks snake along the coastline, dotted with lighthouses. After the stormy monsoon months, fish abound off the coast of Kachchh. As Kachchhis do not live on deep-sea fishing, thousands of fishermen come from outside Kachchh, from as far as Porbander and Daman, to spend the season in the waters rich in fish, lobsters, oysters, prawns and salmon.

As may be expected from the scanty rainfall in Kachchh, the vegetation is of the semi-desert type. Shaded gardens and clumps of trees grow around irrigated *wadis,* farms, especially in Mandvi, Mundra, or in the fifty-odd *rakhals,* protected forests. So rich is the greenery inside some of them that it is difficult to believe that they are in the arid area of Kachchh. Scores of varieties of grasses abound on mountain-sides and pasture areas. A shrubby tree variety imported fifty years ago is now spreading like wildfire in Kachchh – ganda babal literally meaning "the mad tree," *Prosopis juliflora,* is something akin to the 'curse of the golden touch'.

Much of the fauna in Kachchh has gone the same way as in the rest of the world – edged out by human beings. There was a time in the forties when panthers roamed wild around Bhuj. Now only half-a-dozen remain around the Dhinodhar mountain and in some protected forests. Herbivorous animals like blackbuck and cinkara have also greatly decreased. The other existing animals of Kachchh are the wild ass, *nilgai,* wild boar, hare, wolf, hyena, jackal and fox. The caracal is also found in the district, but is very rare.

Amongst domestic animals, the Kachchhi camel is a fleet-footed beast, more suited for riding than carrying loads. However, it has been left far behind in terms of commercial value, fetching only rupees five thousand or so compared to a good buffalo, which could fetch nearly four times that amount. The local breeds of cows, sheep and goats are well suited for the terrain of Kachchh. The



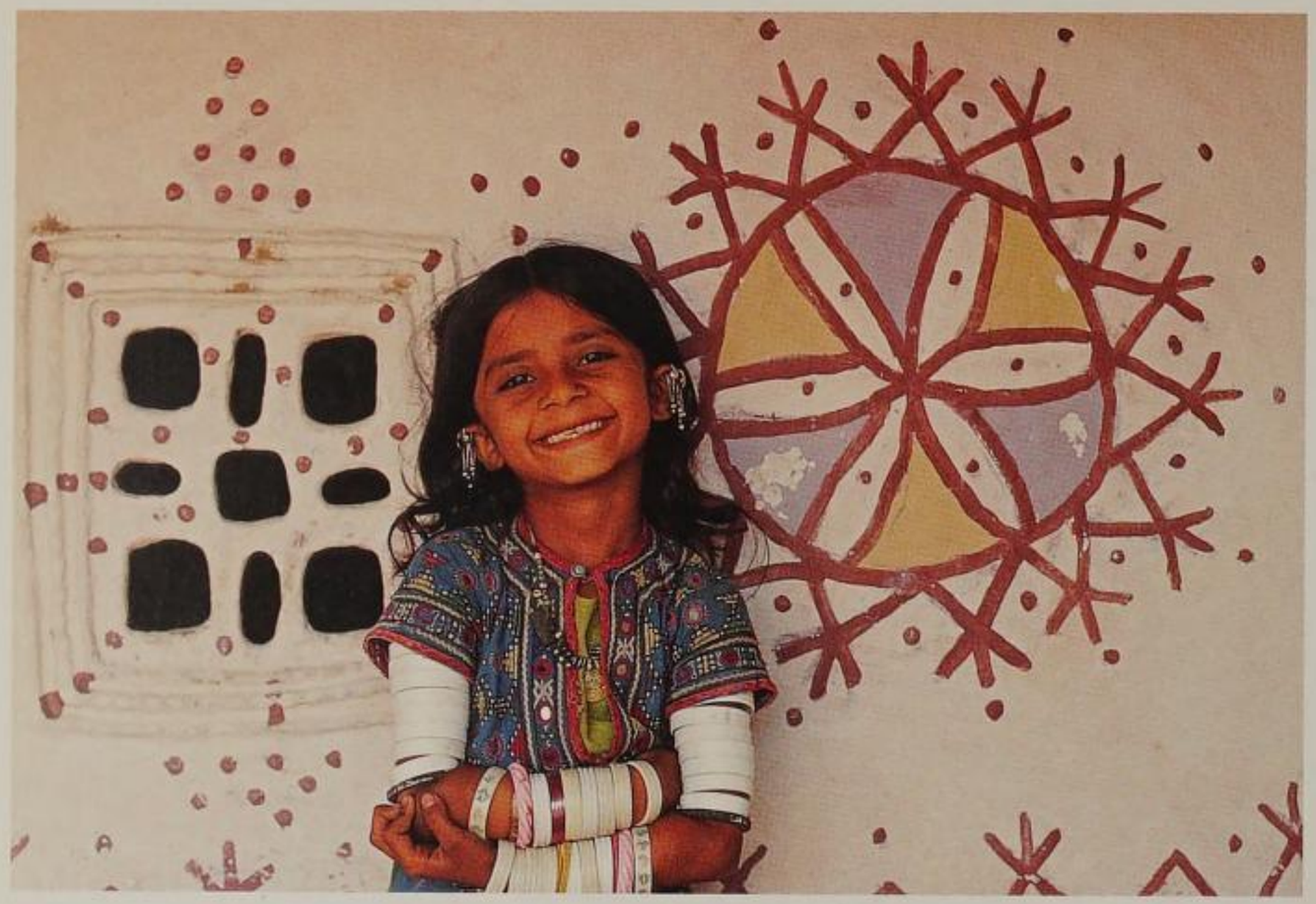


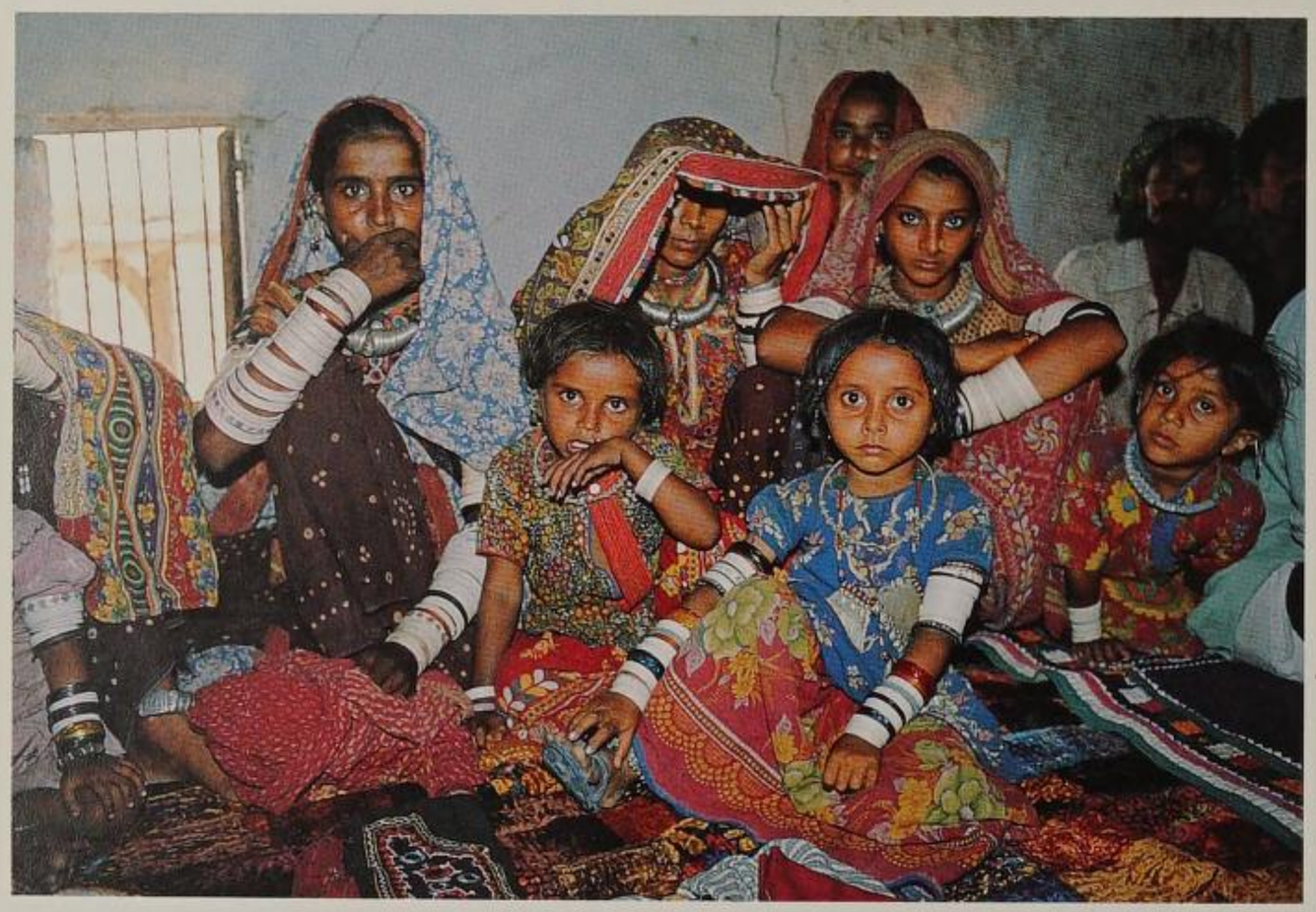
Dhanetah Jaths of Banni. Their women wear a huge gold nose-ring.

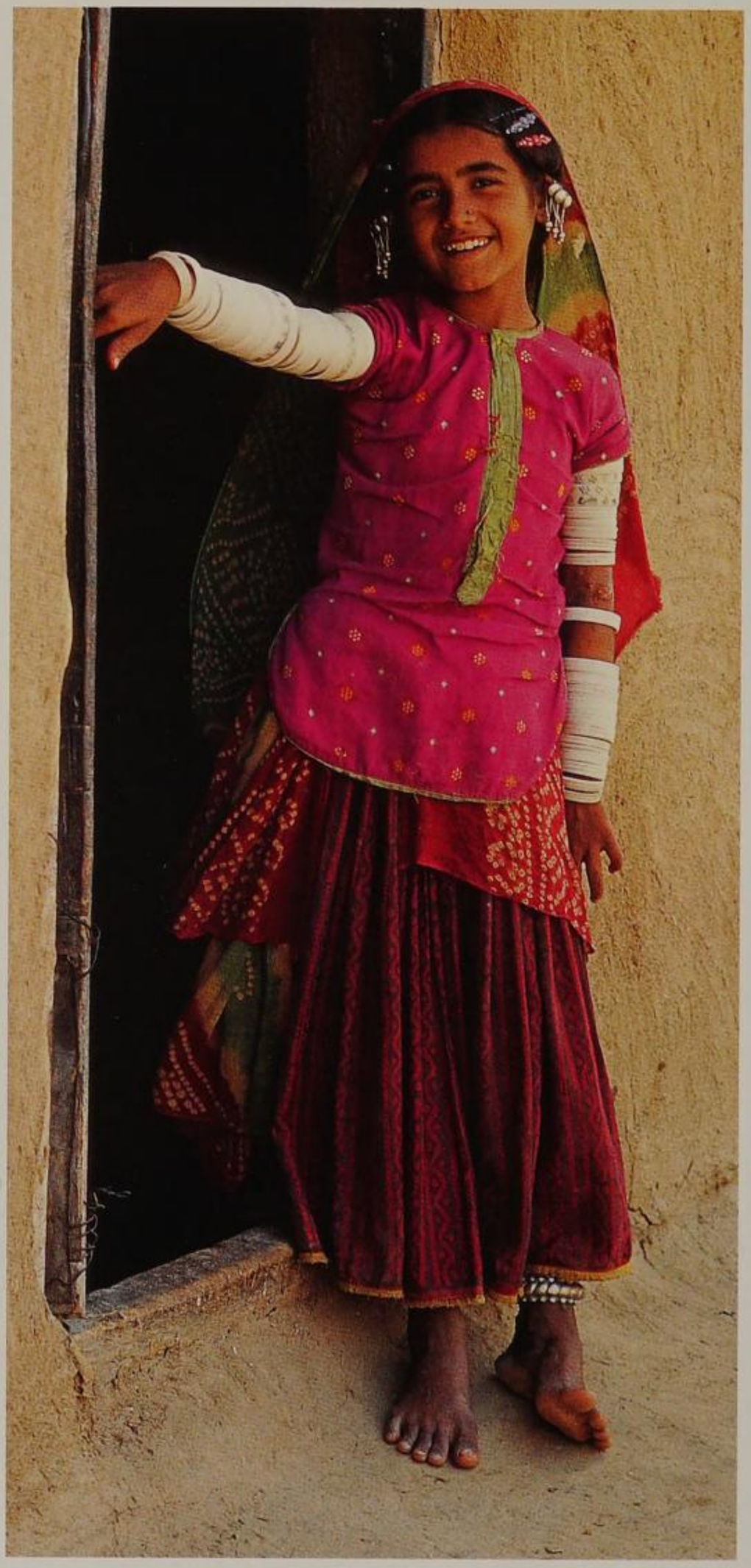
horses, according to Abul Faz were as good as the Arab breed and, according to a story, had been bred from seven choice Arab horses which came to Kachchh when the ship carrying them was wrecked off its shores. "The horses of Cutch were at one time perhaps the best bred in the country. With the increased ease of importing horses from Arabia, Persia, and Australia, however, along with the reasons influencing horse-breeding incident on the British successes over the Mahrattas and Sikhs, the value of the breed has much declined. The Cutch horse is generally a little over 14 hands, well made, spirited, showy in action with clean limbs and good bone, thin long neck, large head, oustanding ram-like brow, and small ears. His chief defects are the length of his cannon bone, his ugly heavy brow, and bad temper" (Watt). Not much of this great strain of horses is now visible. The domestic ass also serves its owners well, whether carrying the potter's articles for sale or the luggage of peripatetic groups. The Kachchhi hound, in particular the one found in the Banni area, with Sindhi blood, is useful in herding animals.

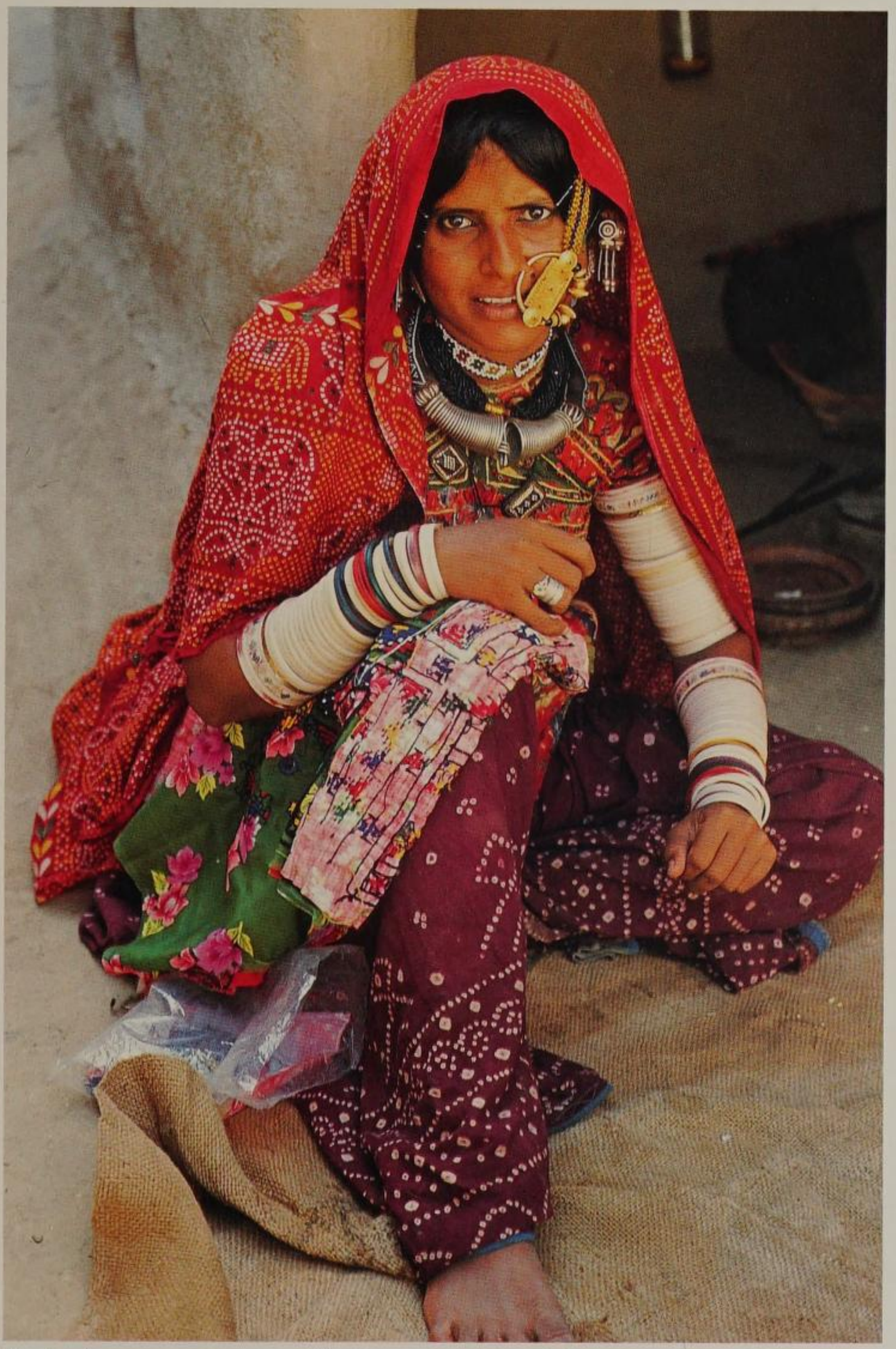
The avifauna in Kachchh has been fortunate in having a succession of rulers who were bird-lovers — Pragmalji, Khengarji (who even tried to introduce guinea fowl from Somaliland) and Vijayrajji. The earlier rulers were assisted by the studies of famous ornithologists like Dr. Ferdinand Stoliczka (1872), Hugh Palin (1878), Capt. C.D. Lester (1898), even the British Resident of Rajkot, Col. C.B. O'Brien, and Sir Geoffrey Archer (1927 and 1942). The great Salim Ali was invited in 1943 and 1944 and wrote a valuable book on the birds of Kachchh.

Travellers in Kachchh have the pleasant company of many varieties of birds who flit across their path every now and then. Driving at night one is met by the jewel-like reflection from the eye of a nightjar sitting on the road. Kachchh is a great aerial junction for migratory birds. Soon after the monsoons the skies are like expressways,

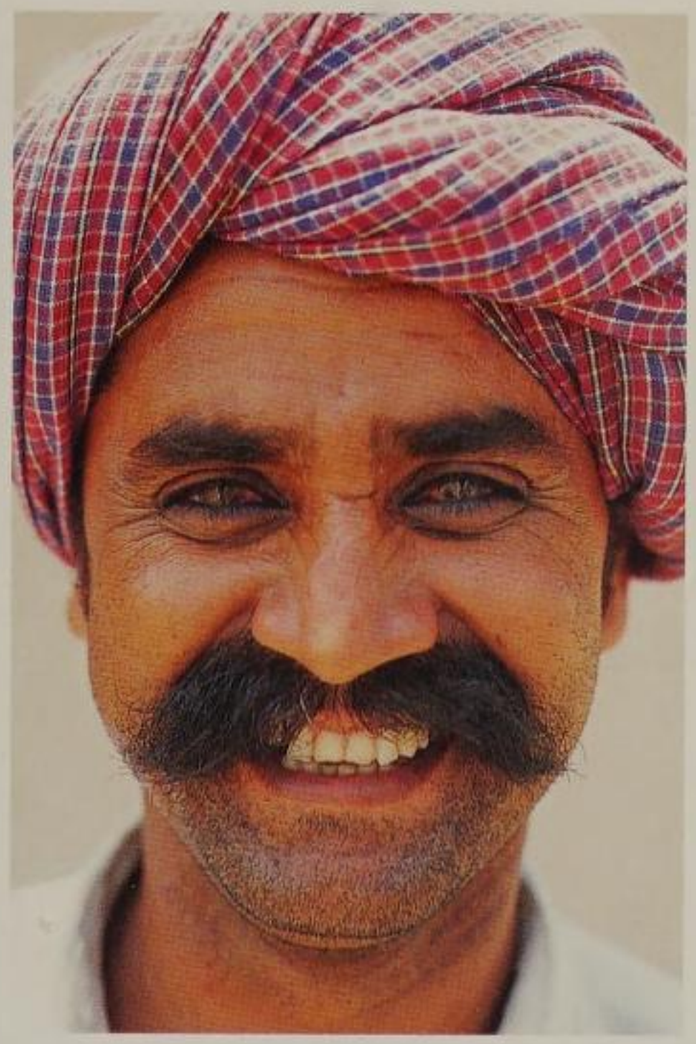




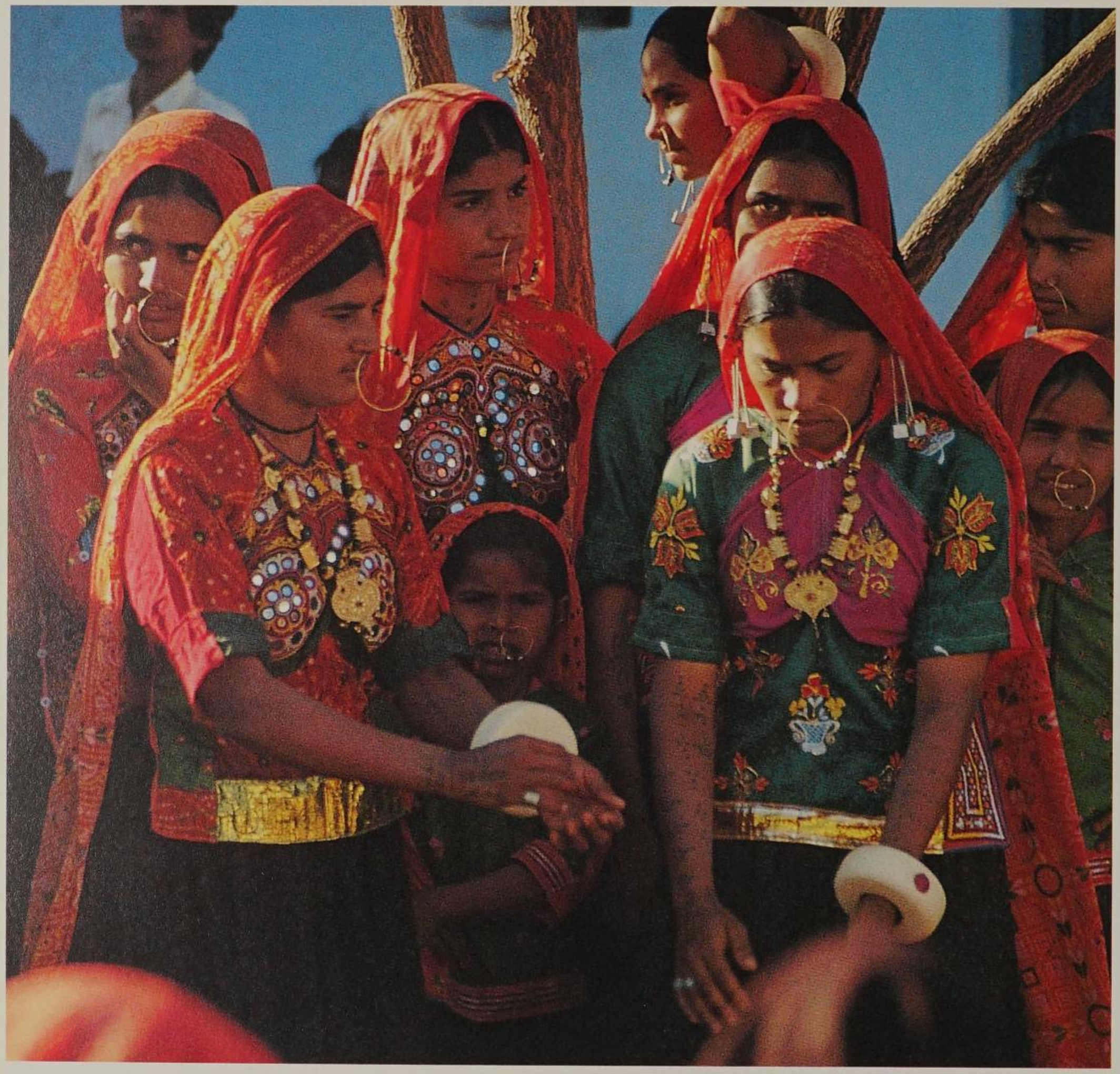




Meghwals are a service group of leather workers. Though they are settled in villages all over Kachchh, they have a close affinity to the nomadic tribes.

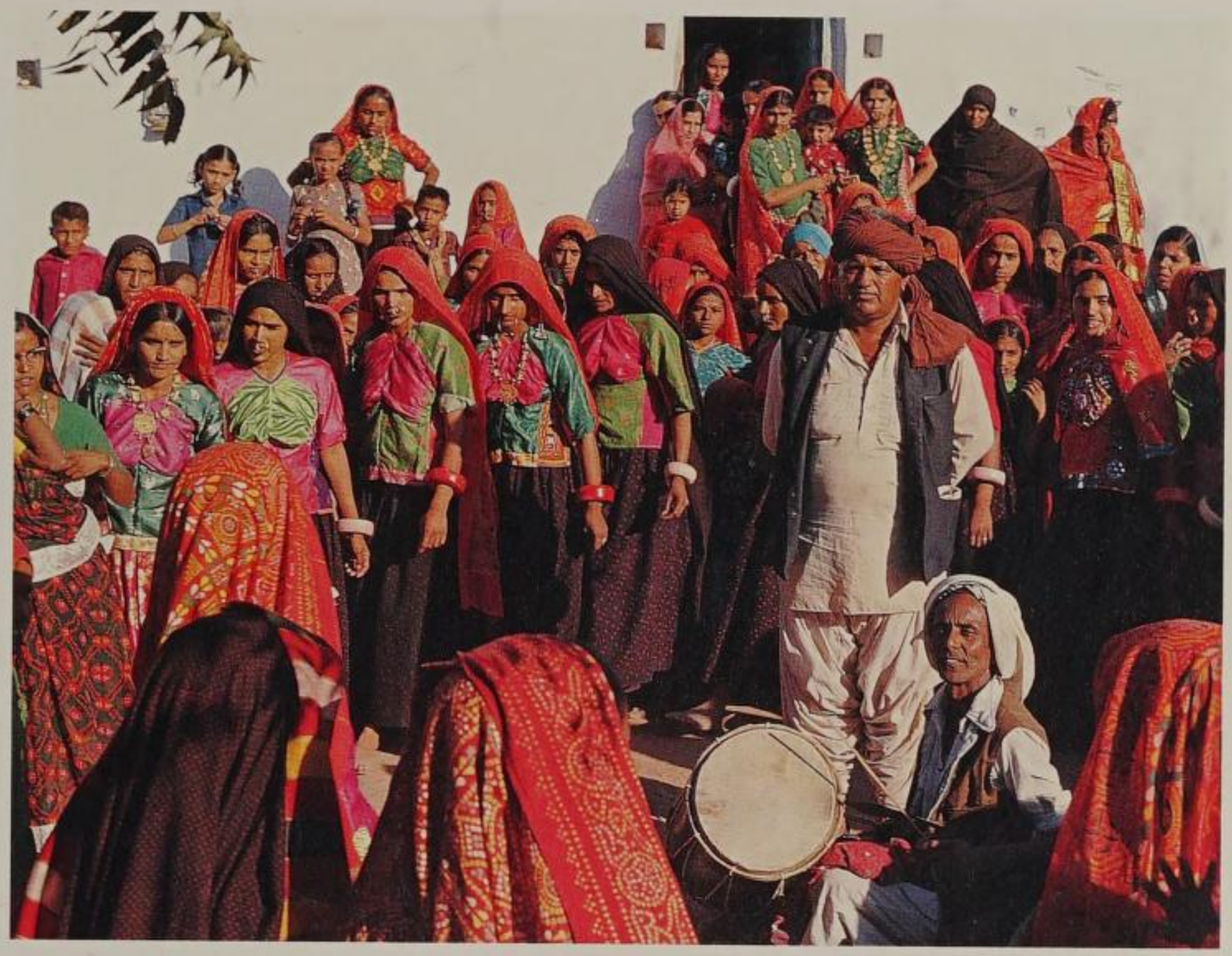


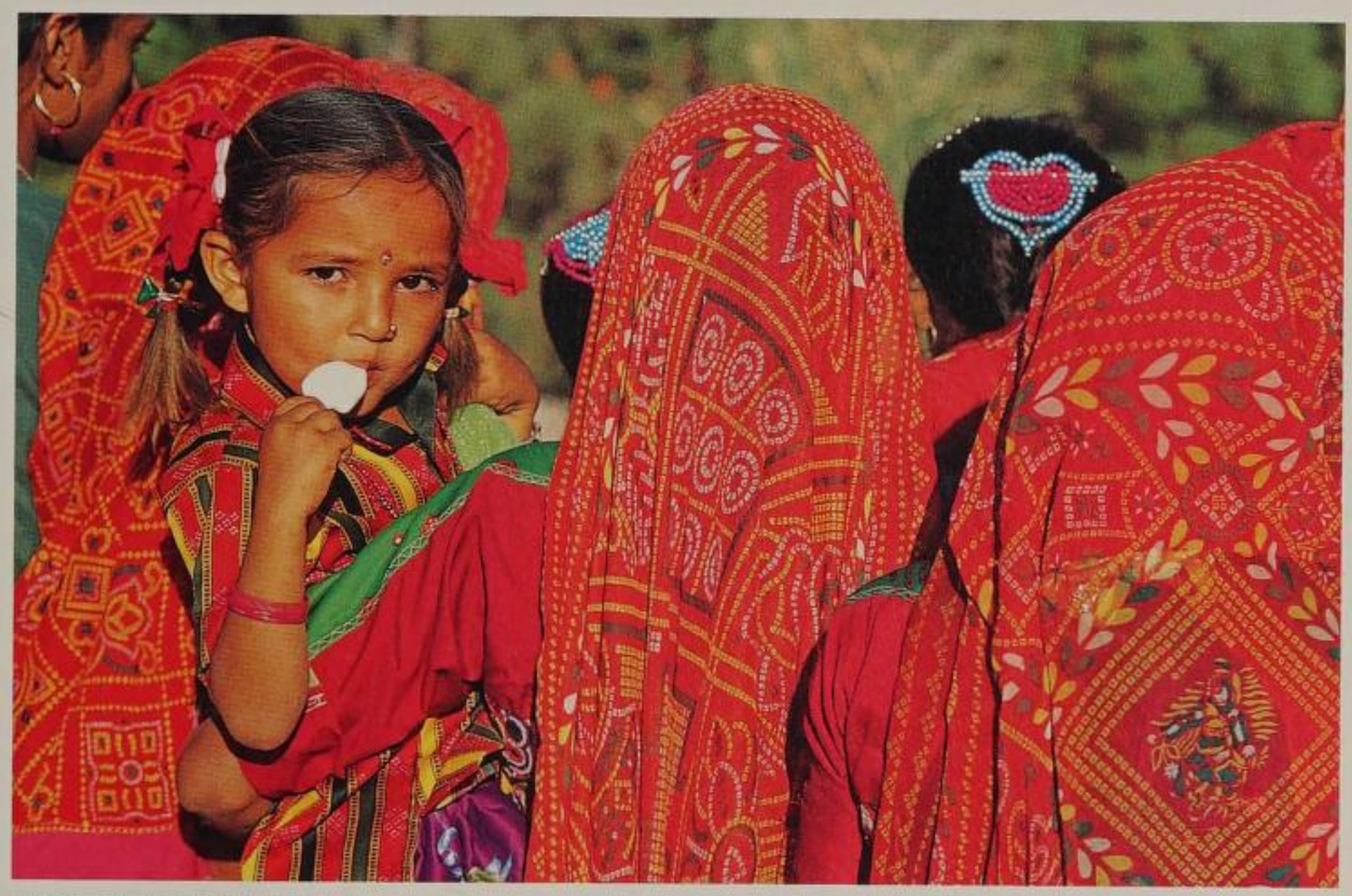
with a great medley of birds on the wing. Watches can be timed with the going and coming of groups for feeding. Salim Ali wrote: "The chief interest of Kachchh ornithology lies in the geographical position of this narrow strip of land relative to the mighty tide of migration that sweeps into India from beyond its northern and north-western boundaries and out again, in the autumn and spring of each year. Apart from the migrants that come to spend the winter here and in peninsular India (the wild fowl, etc.), the area is of further importance in that it lies on the extreme eastern fringe of a broad stream of through migration that flows down from Central and Northern Asia in a south-westerly direction in autumn and vice-versa in spring. This current passes over the North-West Frontier Province, Afghanistan, Baluchistan and Sind, beyond across the Arabian Sea and over Southern Arabia, into British Somaliland and Abys-



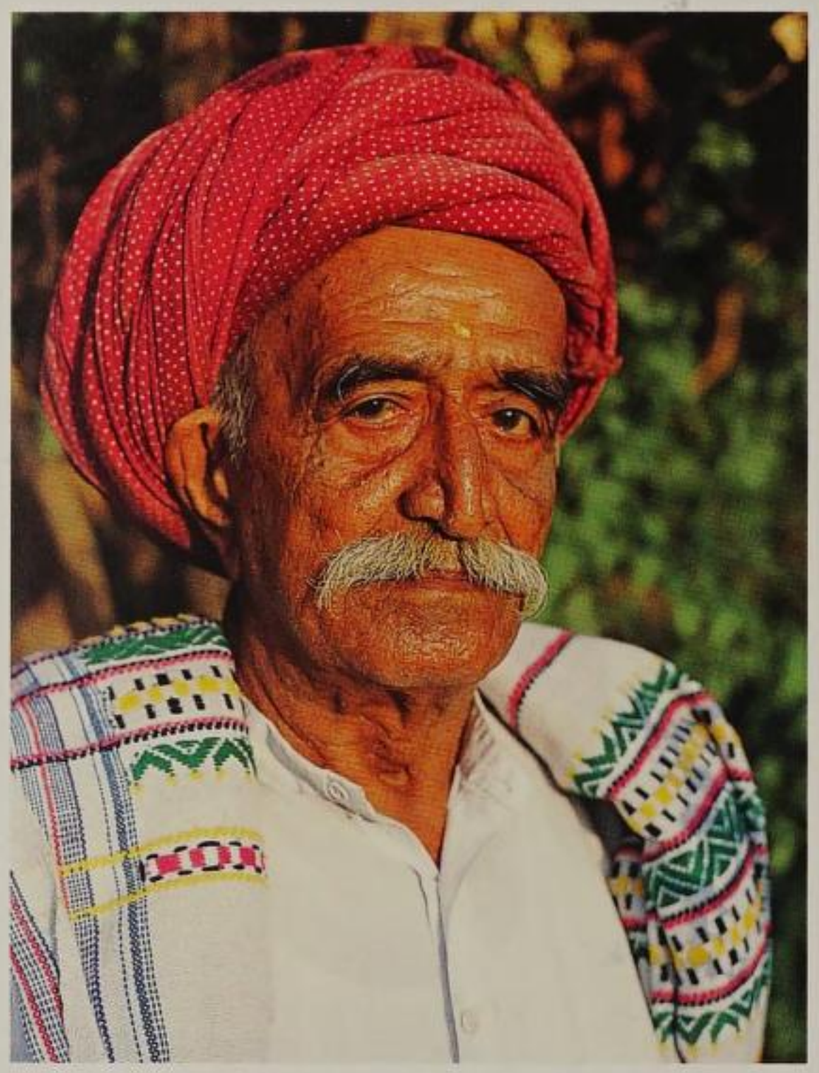
sinia. Thence it straggles down the eastern coast, even as far as South Africa. Most of these African-wintering species pass over Kachchh during September, and early October. They come over in great waves, as it were, 'swarming' during their temporary sojourn, and are completely gone again all within the course of a few short weeks. The journey back to their breeding grounds is evidently performed (in the main, at any rate) over a somewhat different route since the birds are not met with in Kachchh on their return passage in spring. Outstanding examples of the Africa-bound 'through passengers' by the Arabian route are the Gray-Backed Warbler, Indian Whitethroat, Kashmir Roller, European Nightjar and Spotted Flycatcher. Kachchh also derives a substantial quota of its winter visitors and passage migrants into Peninsular India from Northern and Eastern Europe and from countries of the so-called Middle East. The Rosy Pastor, Black-Headed Bunting, Grey-Necked Bunting, Yarkland Short-Toed Lark and White Stork are some of the species that travel by this route. Kachchh is a veritable crossroads for all these migrational streams and offers unlimited scope and possibilities for a well-planned study of Indian bird migration." Other than resident birds, some other winged visitors are the Isabelline Chat, Bluethroat, Paradise Flycatcher, Rufous Warbler, Indus Sand Lark, Osprey, Peregrine Falcon, Demoiselle Crane, Houbara, Lesser Florican, Oyster Catcher or Sea Pie, Painted Stork, Bar Headed Goose, Mallard, Pintail and Blue-Winged Teal.

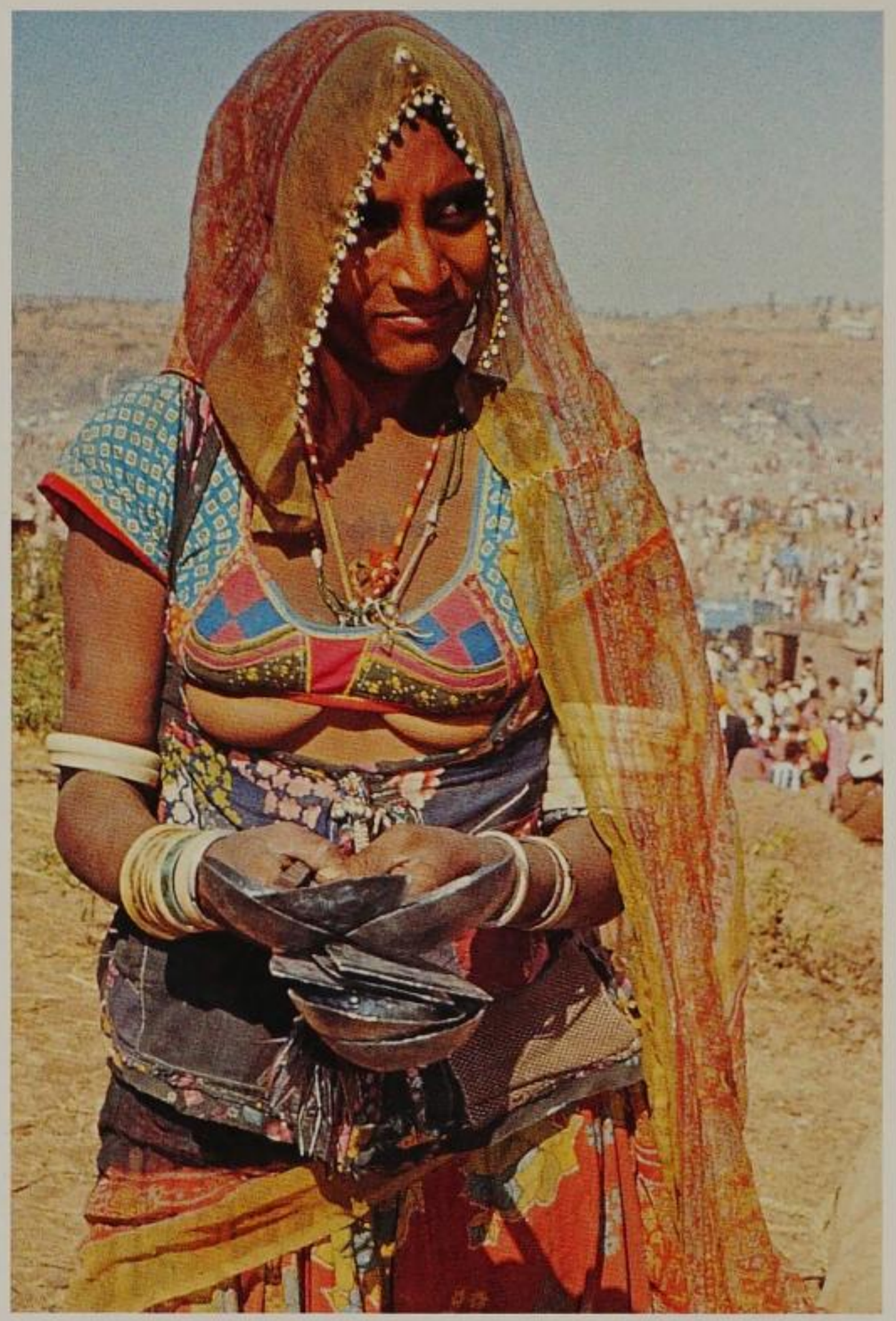
After a good monsoon rainfall the Dhand area, south of Banni, is the best place for bird-watching. It is a shallow marshland some eighty kilometres across and the monsoon water does not dry till February. Other good places are the Chadwa Rakhal with its Pragsar tank, Khari Rohar and the coastal sand belts. The mountain sides, especially Dhinodhar, resound with a medley of bird songs. In 1818 MacMurdo had written that there was no shortage of game birds in Kachchh, including bustards. Pre-



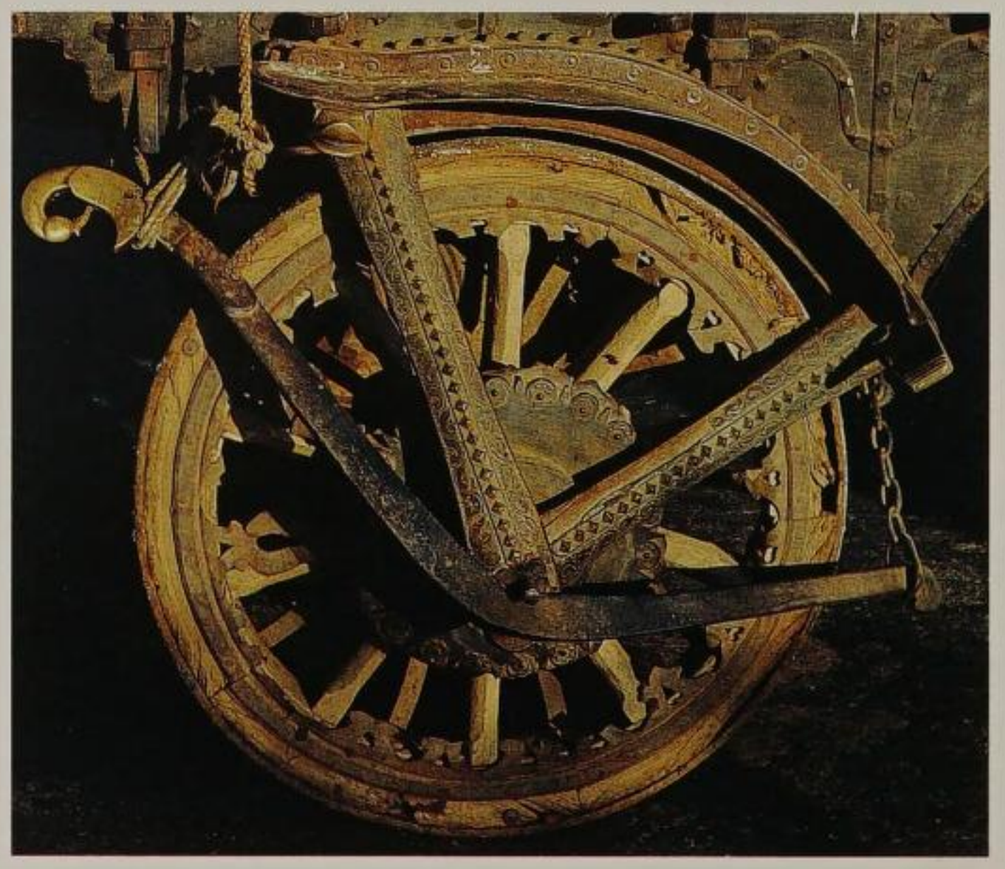


Ahirs of Kachchh. They are a large group in the central region of Kachchh.





Above: A jadeja elder. The Jadejas constituted the bhayyad, the erstwhile nobility of Kachchh. Above right: Gadia Lohar, blacksmith, lady selling wares at a local fair in Kachchh and (right) elaborate wheel in her cart.



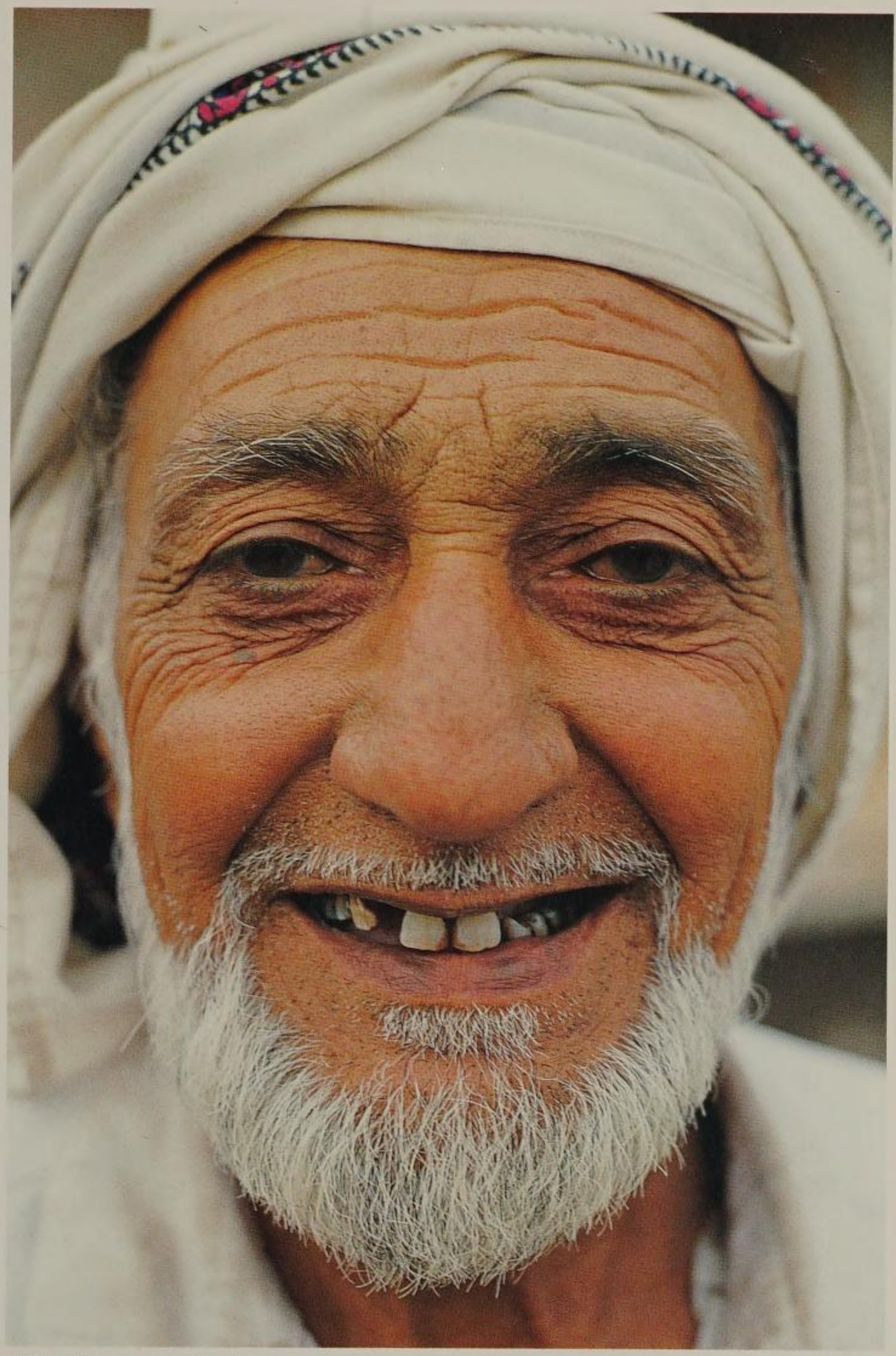
sently, in the sanctuary at Lala, there are never more than half-a-dozen or so.

Maharao Khengarji was the first to discover the only known breeding ground of flamingoes in India, in the Great Rann of Kachchh. They breed when certain factors coincide – the right amount of sea water and rain water ingress to make their island safe and the right degree of organisms for their young ones to feed on. An inexplicable fact is the total absence of raptores from the island airway, which adds to their chicks' security. I was fortunate that during 1990-91 they returned to breed after more than fifteen years.

The journey to and from flamingo colony was an unforgettable one. Their site was some ten kilometres north-east of Kala Dungar, west of Bhanjda Bet. The take-off point on the Pachham mainland is Nirwandh which is reached from Tuga. During the dry season this would be jeepable by skirting the Kala Dungar from either the eastern or the western side. Since the Rann is flooded during the breeding season, it requires a three-hour camel ride across Kala Dungar and this is a fascinating experience in itself. Clearing Kala Durgar and suddenly coming to the vast Rann and descending down to it was a memorable experience.

The camel ride from Nirwandh to the flamingo colony took six hours of continuous wading through three to four feet deep water. Perched on the camels while they stomped and splashed through the waters, we hoped that they would not try to sit down or slip. The ground under their feet was slippery and it was remarkable how the camels went across without slipping even once. My respect for the Kachchhi camel increased greatly during the journey and I realised why, for marshy areas, it is much more suited than the Rajasthani camel. The Kachchhi camel revels in water and manages easily in slashy areas.

We reached the colony around mid-day and spent nearly an hour there. I had not taken my photographic equipment for fear of being tempted to go too close to the nests



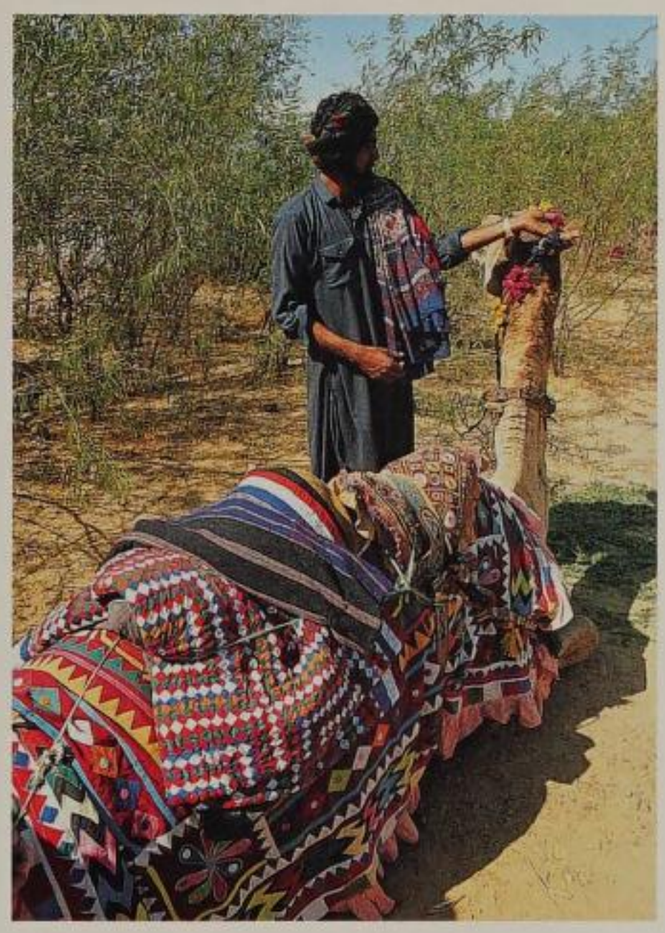
A Kumbhar, potter, Bhuj.

A Rabari girl in her finery.

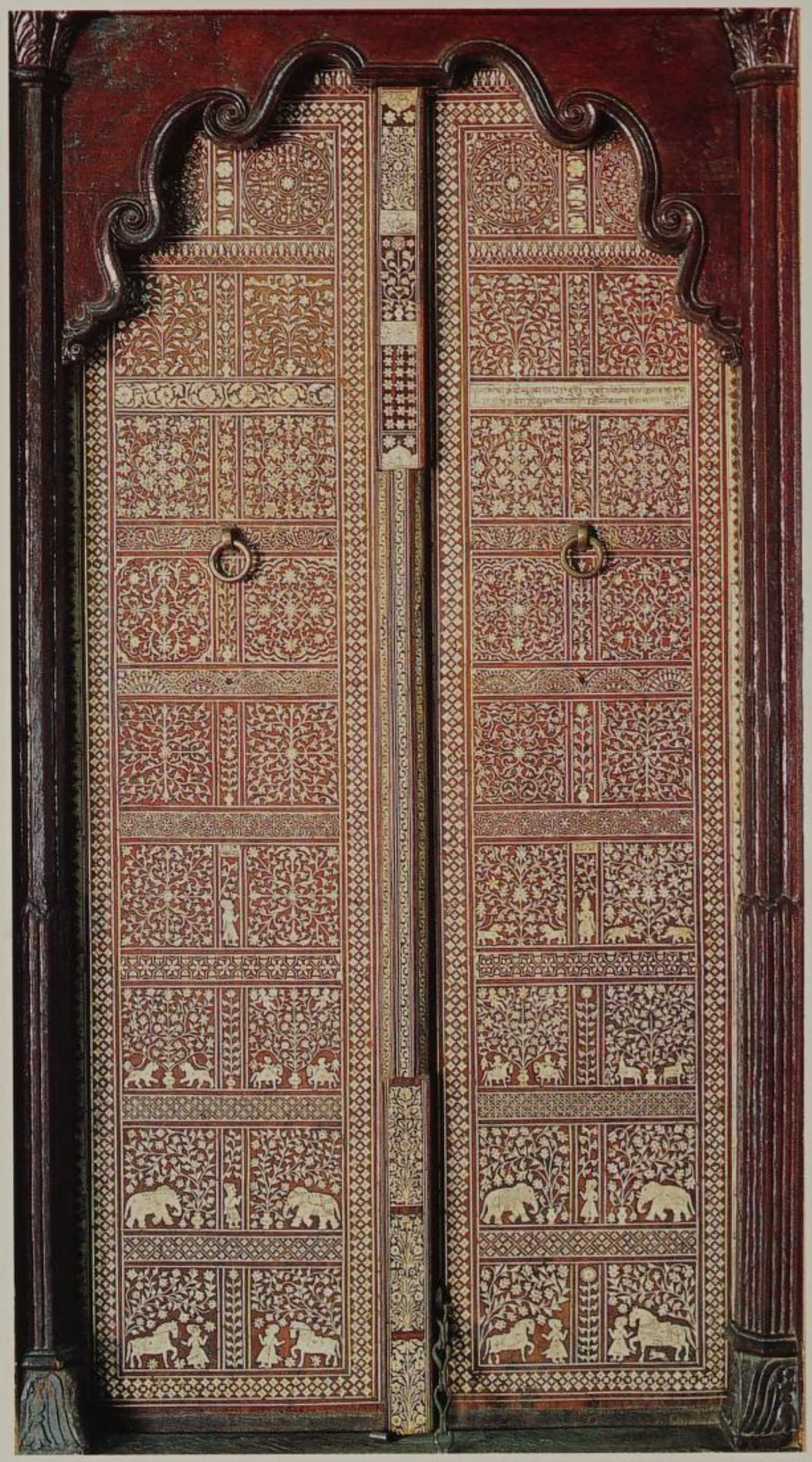
and disturbing the birds. It was a breathtaking sight – thousands of flamingoes and their young ones, with more chicks ready to hatch from the eggs lying in their crater-shaped nests. The air was filled with their sounds. Then the return journey, again six hours, non-stop, through the Rann waters and, in the stillness of the night, a four-hour camel ride across Kala Dungar from Nirwandh to Tuga and back to Bhuj, at well past midnight.

Kachchh is no stranger to natural calamities. However, out of drought, disease, earthquake and locusts, only drought visits at least twice a decade, if not more frequently. When it does happen, with state intervention no distress is allowed to take place, in contrast to be the case earlier. The drought in 1813 was particularly bad. "Destitute and unruly bands passing to Sindh plundered the villages and grain was sold only in well-guarded stores.... Many sold their children for food. A cat or dog was a delicacy and even human flesh was eaten. In 1815, still known as *underiu*, or the rat year, a promising early harvest was destroyed by rats, which, swarming over the fields, carried off the ears of corn. In 1834 the promise of a good harvest was destroyed by locusts. One flight swept through Bhuj, filling some of the houses so thickly as to put a stop to all cooking. In 1813 bubonic plague carried off many people, including Jamadar Fateh Mohammed. In 1876 cholera was responsible for 954 deaths. In 1878 cholera struck so severely that in Bhuj alone, of a population of 23,000 souls, for 2 months about 40 died a day. The number of ascertained deaths from cholera and fever amounted to 15,714 or taking the population of Kachchh at 487,345, a percentage of 3.2%. The same year a severe form of horse-disease called *jerbaj* carried off 64 of the State horses" (Campbell).

Just before the monsoon season, anxious speculation begins as to the prospects of the rains. Some people can forecast from a particular berry that grows in the coastal area. The Fakirani Jath living on the Lakhpat



Top: Women wearing block printed textiles of Kachchh. Above: Leather articles created by Meghwal artisans. Right: A Patchwork quilt being used with a camel's saddle.

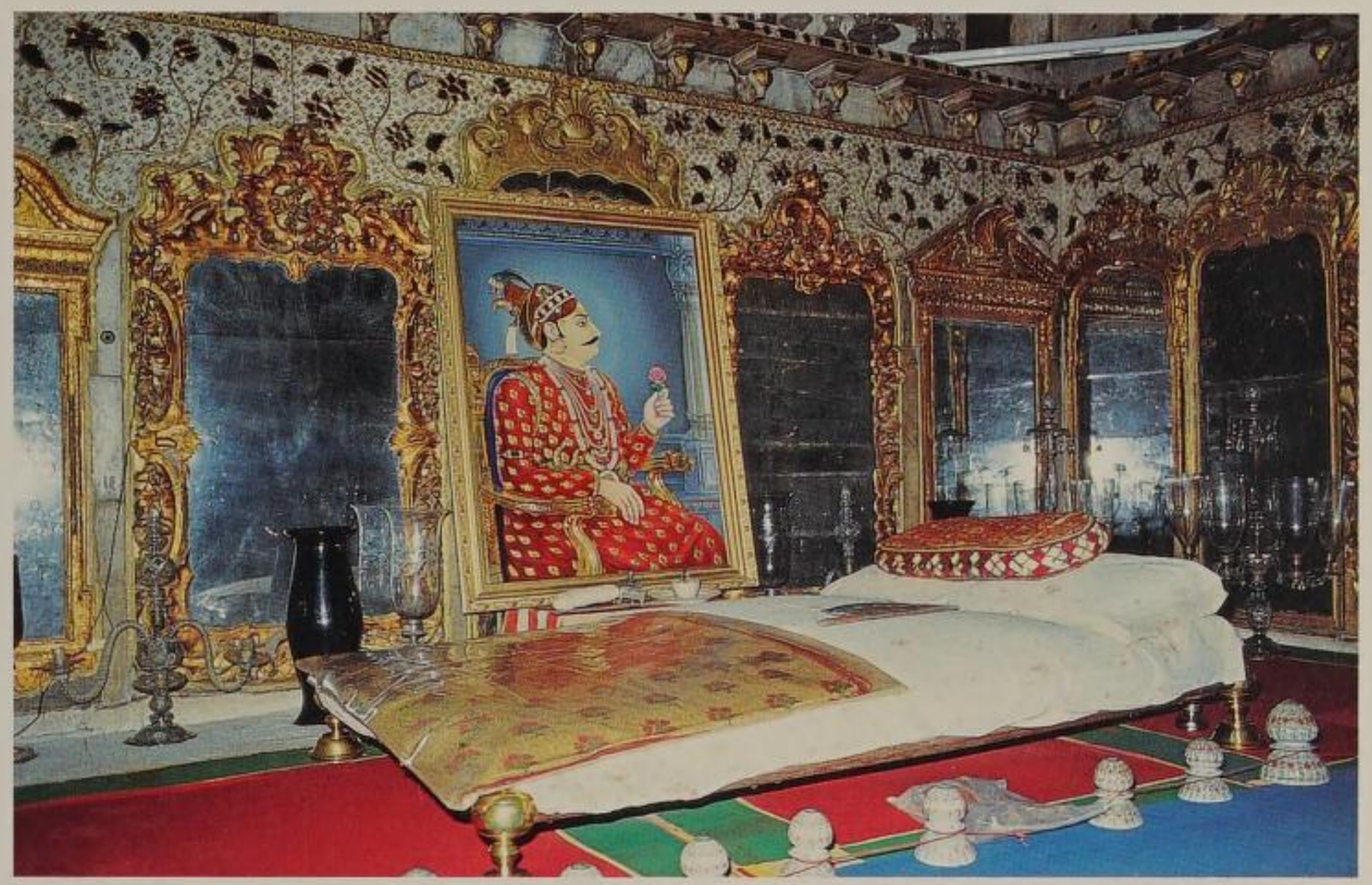


Far right: Ivory inlay door, Aina Mahal. Above: Kachchhi pottery. Right: Rogan, *very fine lacquer work on cloth.*

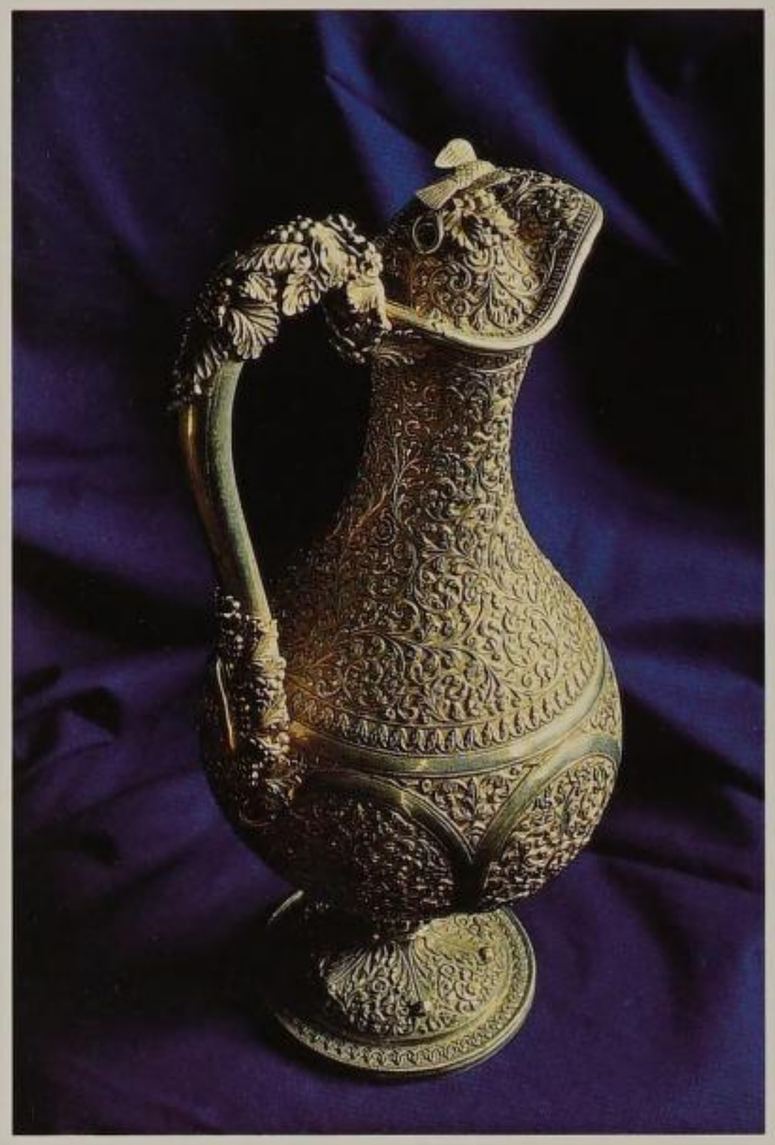
coast divine the intensity of the expected monsoon from the tides. It is also said that the nesting behaviour of birds foretells the quantity of the impending monsoon. The mood of the cattle is also an indicator. The appearance of a type of a red ant is considered a good sign. If there is heavy dew during all the four nights of the Diwali festival, it augurs well for monsoon rains. The direction of the breeze is also important and of course, meteorologically, very relevant. However, the rains in the area remain highly unpredictable. Some years there is not even a fraction of a centimetre of rain, whereas in a freak monsoon, there can be more than hundred centimetres of rain within a span of three or four days, flooding the entire district. If Hamirsar Lake in Bhuj overflows, according to tradition, a holiday is declared by the Collector's office.

A great challenge lies in the management of the water resources of Kachchh for drinking as well as for irrigation purposes. Some very ambitious projects have been undertaken, including those aided by the World Bank. For example, the entire Banni region receives piped water from sources near Bhuj, through an elaborate network of pipes criss-crossing the country. During periods of scanty rainfall the situation becomes critical in many areas which do not have underground water reserves. Considerable work has been done in this field by the Mandvi based Vivekanand Research and Training Institute. By practically demonstrating the techniques and advantages of ground water recharge using low cost appropriate technology, people are motivated to adopt such methods by the institute.

Once it is apparent that the monsoon has failed a pall of gloom descends and everyone gears up for the tough year ahead. Local celebrations and *melas* are subdued. Wells and reservoirs start drying up and the nomads migrate to the southern areas of Gujarat with their cattle, assisted by the state government. A package of schemes is started by the district administration, which



Gilded mirrors in Rao Lakha's room at Aina Mahal, Palace of Mirrors and (above) his sword and shield. He was the most colourful of all the Kachchh princes.

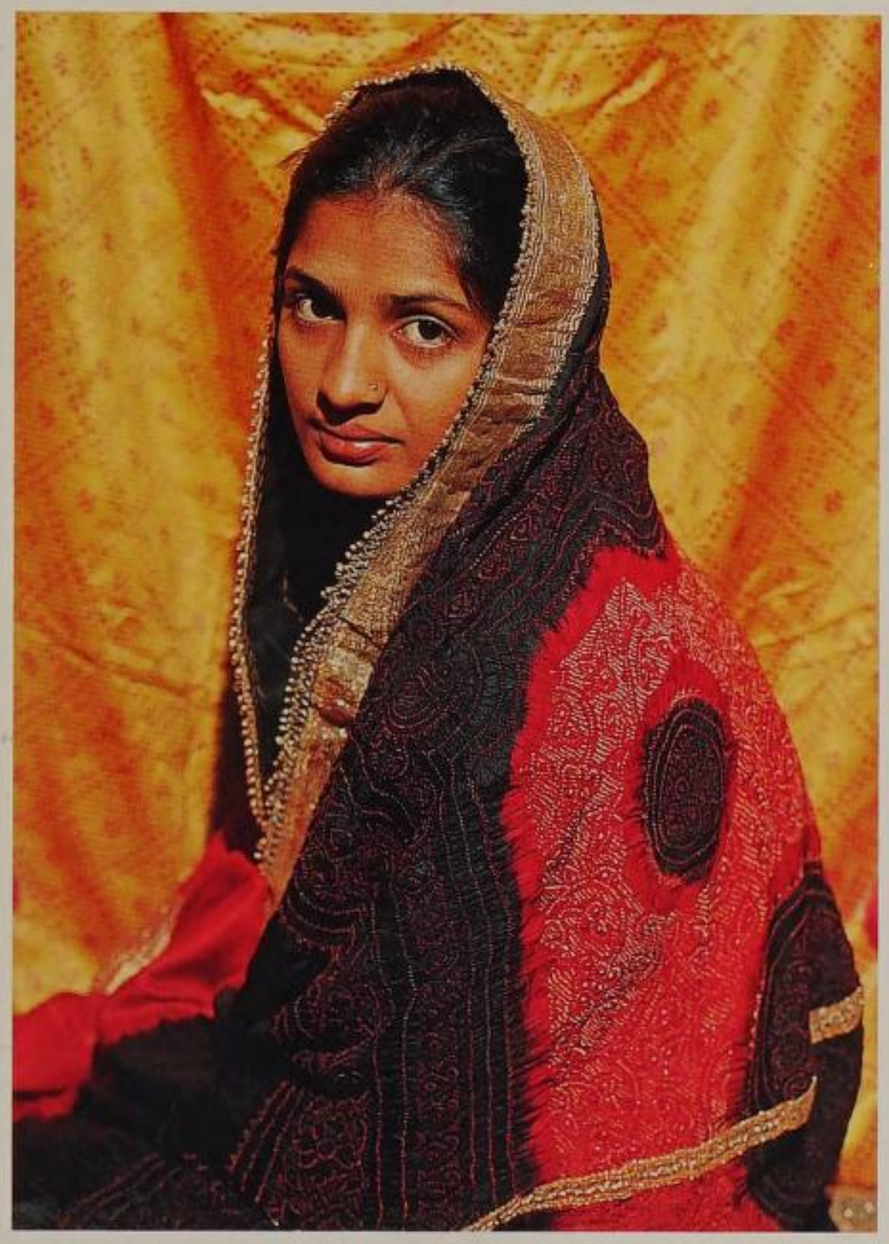


Kachchh is famous for its silver work on precious metals. Above: Dagger handles. Above middle: Jug. Above right: Gold crown of deity, Naryansarover. Right: Rabari necklace.

include arrangements for relief works, cash doles, fodder and water supply. Since the last drought an innovation was successfully carried out, that has now become a regular drought relief scheme – that of organising artisans and rural women into making handicraft and handloom items, thus supplementing their income, working at home only. Crafts like embroidery, block-printing, weaving, wood and lacquer-work are included. Designs are provided to the artisans, prompt collection and payment is done, and the goods so made are marketed all over India. This has been very successful and not only are the artisan families helped but there has been a resurgence of craft traditions in Kachchh. The skills which would have gradually been lost are now being revived.

The area has also been earthquake-prone and the worst one was in 1819. At that time, in Bhuj, seven thousand houses collapsed and eleven hundred people were buried alive. It also resulted in the formation of a massive bank called Allah Bund, or God's Embankment, across the old bed of the Indus. Many other seismic disturbances have taken place earlier and, though not documented, their results are obvious from the changing topography of Kachchh. The presence of the great volcano, Dhinodhar, is a reminder that this tract is the centre of strong subterranean energy. The last bad earthquake was in 1956 and it caused havoc in the town of Anjar.

Top: Felt layer for a horse saddle. Above: Traditional wood and lacquer work.



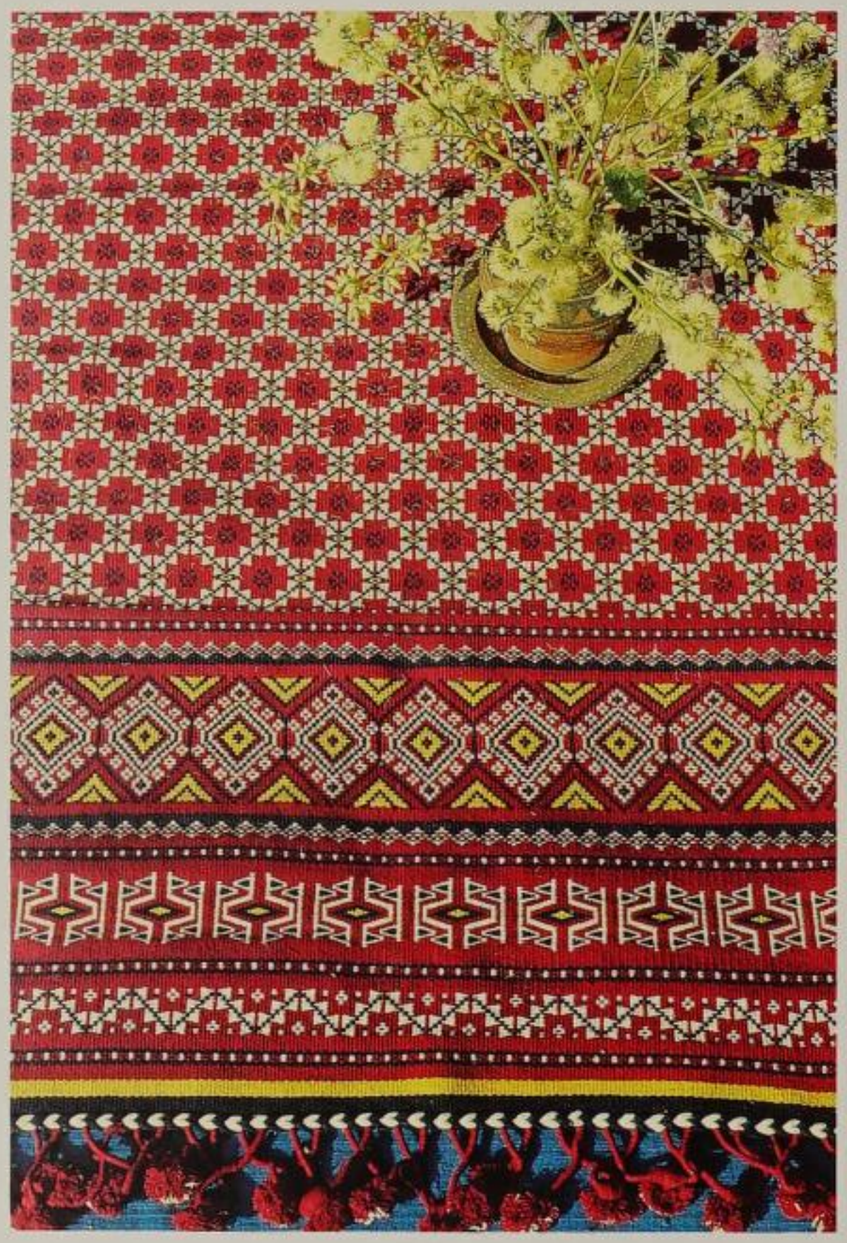
Left: Rabari woollen odhnis *with red* bandhni, *tie and dye, patterns and patches of embroidery.*
Above: Wagadia Rabari shawl, which includes embroidered and woven patterns.
Top: Extremely fine bandhni on silk, done by the Khatri community of Kachchh.

PEOPLE

Kachchh has been a significant confluence point for different races and people. The nomadic pastoralists are certainly the most interesting and their links can be traced on one side to Marwar and Mewar (regions of Rajasthan), Saurashtra and, on the other side, Sindh and beyond to Afghanistan, Iran and Central Asia.

The great Rabari group is spread over the western plains of India from Kachchh to Rajasthan. They are Hindu cattle-breeders and shepherds, falling into three endogamous groups – those of Kachchh, Rajasthan and central Gujarat. There are further sub-divisions according to region like the Garasia, Kachela, Dhebaria and Wagadia of Kachchh. Rabaris worship the mother goddess, Ramdev Pir, horsemen heroes and the sainted dead. In Kachchh, after the monsoon rains and their year's wanderings, they celebrate all marriages on one day only, that of Gokul Ashtami, the birthday of Lord Krishna.

The Rabaris link their origin with Shiva through their mythical ancestor Sambal, whom Shiva created out of his sweat along with the camel. Another version is that Shiva made Parvati look after the camel until one day she refused to do so any longer. So he made a doll of grass, put life into it and entrusted the camel to its care – that of the first Rabari. According to another account, Shiva gave Sambal three of his *apsaras,* celestial damsels, as wives and from them he had a son and four daughters. Shiva, the ascetic god, then asked Sambal, now that he had a huge family, to leave his celestial abode and live outside. From that time onward Sambal was known as Rahabari, i.e. he who lives outside. According to yet another tradition the Rabaris were originally Rajputs who, instead of marrying Rajput women, married



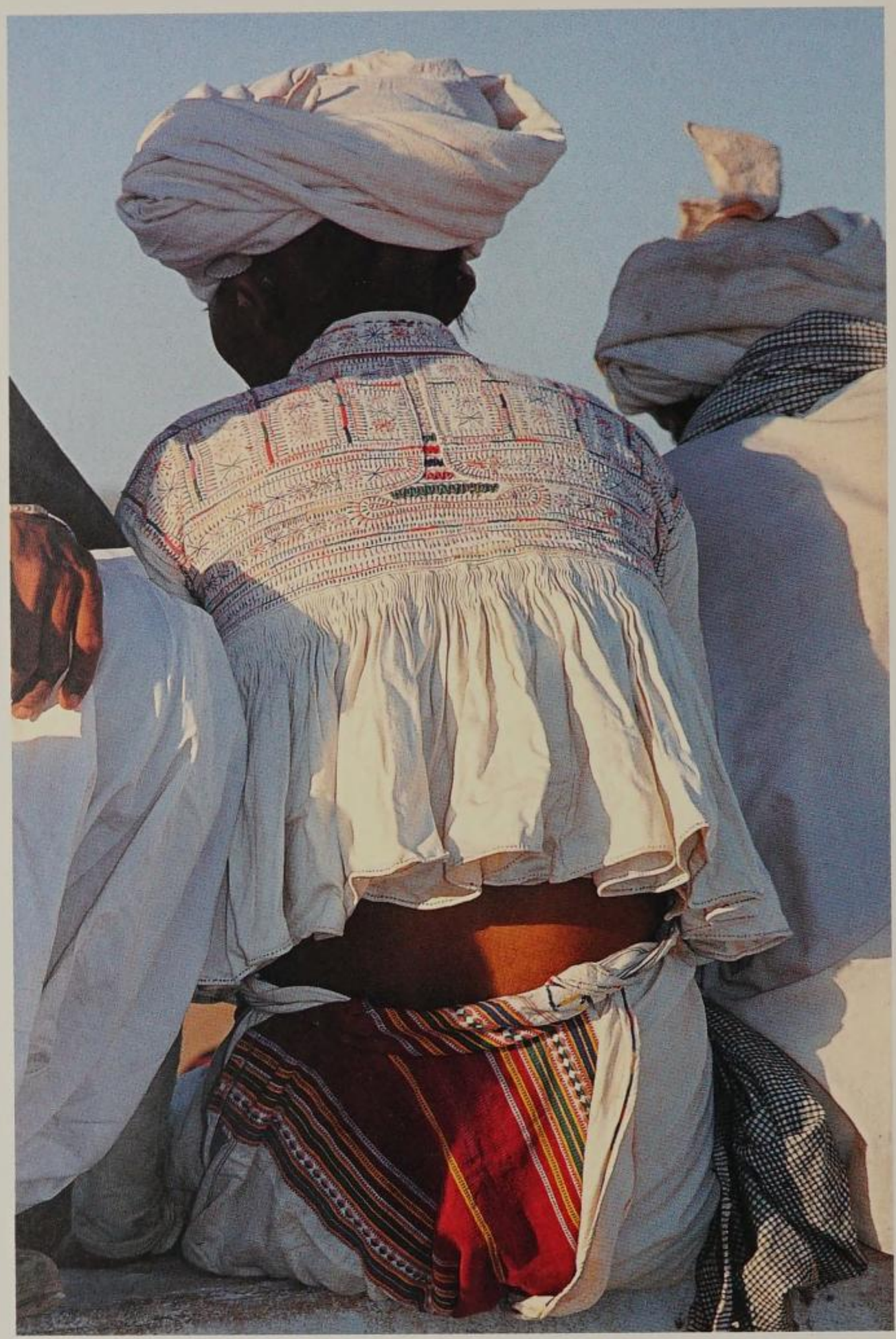
Handwoven wool and cotton rugs and traditional woollen shawls.

Top: Wall murals in MacMurdo's bungalow, Anjar. Above: A portion of the painted Ramayana around the walls of a room at Tera fort.

Above: Woven camel girth strap with human and animal motifs.
Right: Rabari bead work.
Opposite page: Dhanetah Jath women with their embroidery.

apsaras. Subsequently they were called Rahabaris, 'goers out of the path', because they did not marry Rajput women. Perhaps the most logical explanation for their name is that they are nomads and unlike settled agriculturists have gone out of the mainstream path, the other derivations being puns on the name. They are a kindly and contented lot.

It appears that the original home of the Rabaris was Marwar, from where they spread into other parts of Rajasthan, Gujarat and even Madhya Pradesh. Those of Kachchh appear to have taken a different route altogether. Enthoven traces their origin thus: "The original home of the Rabari was Marwar. According to one account, the Rabaris of Cutch had their home in Jhalra Patan, in the time of Alla-ud-din Khilji. In one of his expeditions to Rajputana, Alla-ud-din heard of the extraordinary beauty of a Rabari girl of that place and wanted to marry her. The Rabari craved a short respite to consider the matter, giving their bards as hostages. They then secretly left the place, and wandering west came to Nagar Summa in Sind, where a Sumra prince was ruling. He gave them shelter. Soon after, about the year 1315 A.D. the Sumra power in Sindh was crushed by Muhammadans. The Rabaris then took refuge with the Sammas and went with them to Cutch, supplying them with milk from their herds of camels and cows. But they never forgot their former patrons, the Sumras and to this day, their women do not colour their ivory bangles but wear them white as a sign of mourning. The earliest settlement of Rabaris in Cutch was Morchimana, a village near Matano Madha in Lakhpat District. Vagham Chavda Gadha and Ghuntali, the two villages with which the first advent of Sammas in Cutch is associated, were also situated in or near the same district, a circumstance which lends support to their belief that they came to Cutch with the Sammas about the year 1320. The Rabari further attribute the easy terms on which they hold land in Cutch to their devotion to the present ruling tribute



Embroidery of different communities of Kachchh. Right above: Meghwal kanjari, woman's bodice. Right: A Rabari boy's embroidered cap. Above: Typical pleated and machine embroidered jacket worn by Rabari men.

of Cutch. So complete was their exodus from Sind that not a single family was left. The present Rabari families in Sind are immigrants from Cutch. Some of the Rabari families, especially those in Anjar and Vaghad, appear to have come from Marwar."

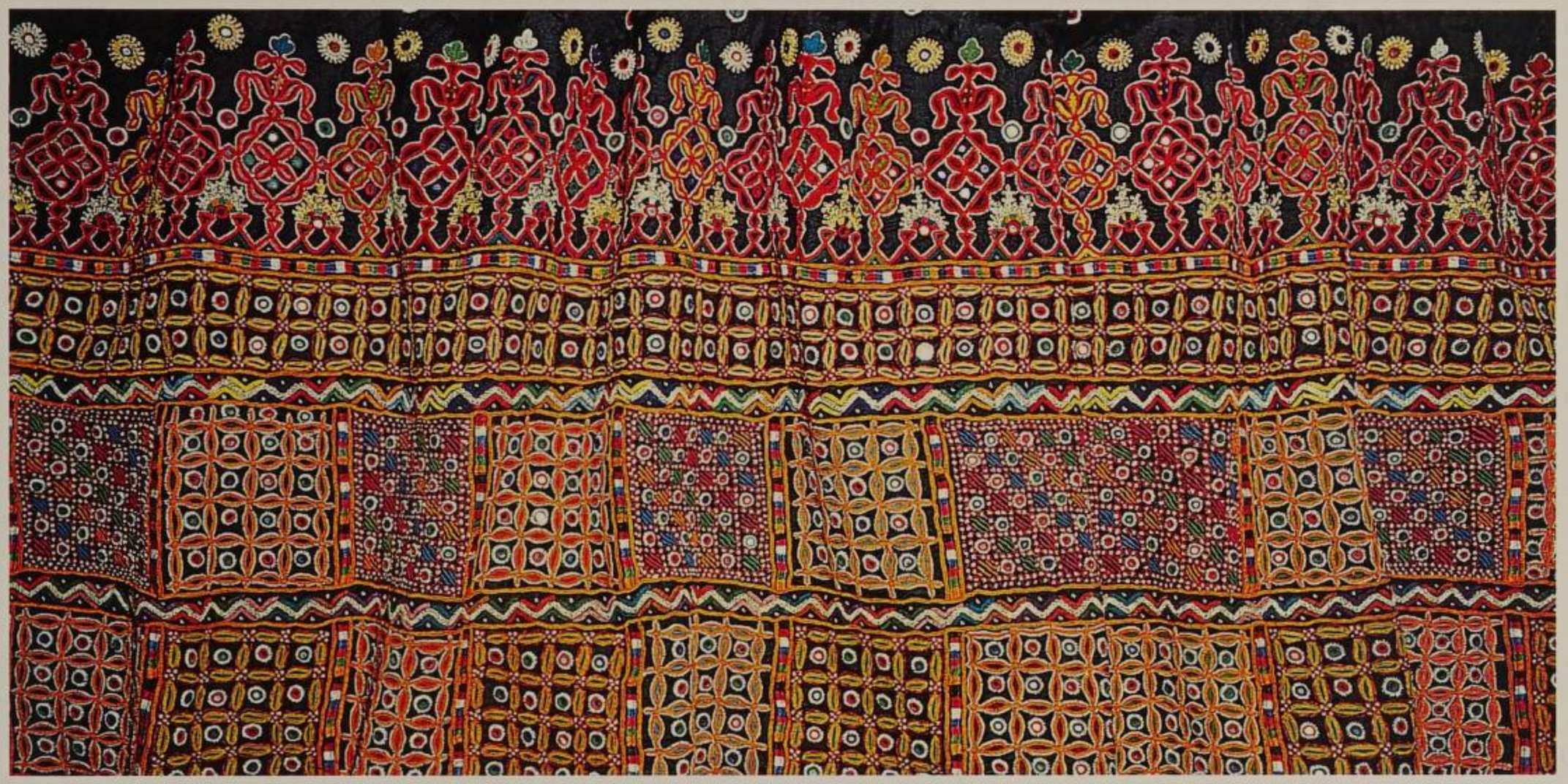
The other main group of pastoralists consists of two dozen nomadic and semi-nomadic Muslim groups who trace their roots from Sindh and beyond. The Jath are the largest such group. The others are smaller and live in the Banni area, a low-lying, sixteen hundred square kilometers pastureland close to the salt marshes of the Great Rann of Kachchh, and also in the surrounding areas. The main clans are the Halipotra, Raisipotra, Mutwa, Node, Hingorjah, Bhambha, Cher, Junejah, Kaskalee, Korar, Ladai, Nunai, Pathan, Baluch, Samejah, Sumra and Tabah. The Dhanetah section of the Jath are also in the Banni. They keep mainly cattle, no goats, and are settled around nearly fifty water-holes in the Banni.

Racially these Banni herders stand apart from other people of the region. They came in groups from Sindh some five hundred years ago. They all have similar, Muslim, marriage customs. Even though some groups are extremely small, with a few dozen families only, they still practise endogamy. I have noticed that this has had a curious in-breeding effect on their physiognomy. This is heightend by the fact that they fancy a flattened head and after birth their babies' heads are so moulded with pillows.

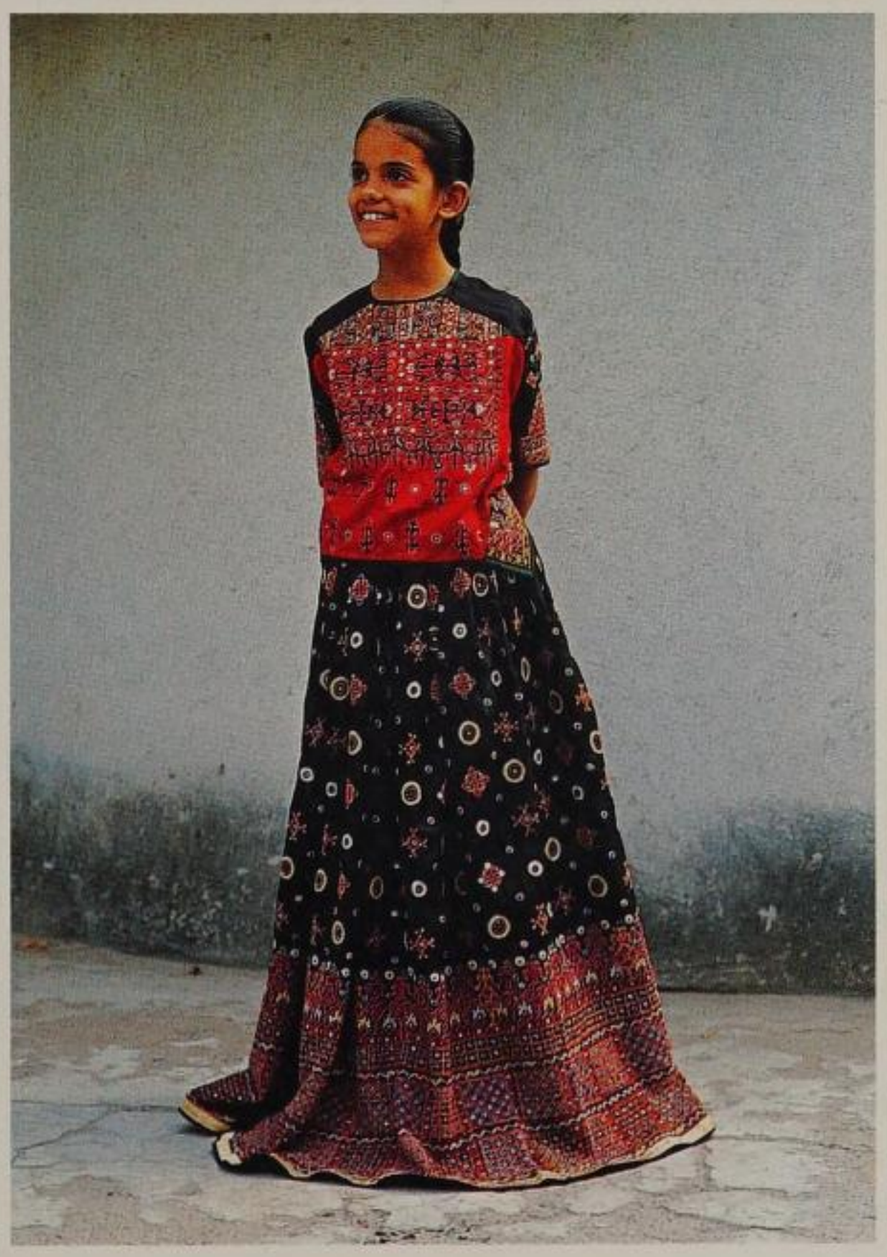
They are semi-nomadic in the sense that their wanderings are local as long as pastures, including the Banni, can support their animals. Towards the end of the year (earlier in drought years) they travel to distant areas and return just before the expected monsoon. Some other functional groups in and around Banni have attached themselves to these pastoral groups, like the Meghwals who dispose of the carcasses of dead animals, prepare and tan the skins for making shoes, well-buckets, saddles and harnesses. Some Meghwals have even taken to herding.

Top: Raisipotra woman's kanjari. *Below: Detail of exquisite Mochi embroidery on a lady's* ghagra, *gown.*

Garments created by Shrujan using Kachchhi embroidery. Above: Soof *technique of the Sodhas and (top) detail. Right above:* Mukuoh *embroidery pattern that uses metallic thread.*



The Jaths are a nomadic community spread over Kachchh. It is important to clarify that the term Jath, spoken with a soft 't', implies a very different set of people than those bearing the similar sounding name of Jat. The former is a Muslim herdsman from Sindh while the latter is a Hindu or Punjabi cultivator of North India. The Jaths of Kachchh appear to have started their migration to this area, from Sindh, some four hundred years ago. Their main groups are the Dhanetah, Fakirani and Garasia. The label Dhanetah is possibly derived from *dhan*, because of the wealth of their herds. A distinctive feature in the daily adornment of Dhanetah Jath women is a huge gold ring worn in the nose. The Fakirani Jaths, from *fakir*, were the holy men of their communities, but now are mainly cattle breeders, living in reed huts in the coastal areas of Lakhpat. They are the follower of Savla Pir, whose tomb is on a mud island in a creek off Lakhpat. The Jaths who have settled down to cultivation are called Garasias, meaning landowner. They venerate a woman saint known as Mai Bhambi



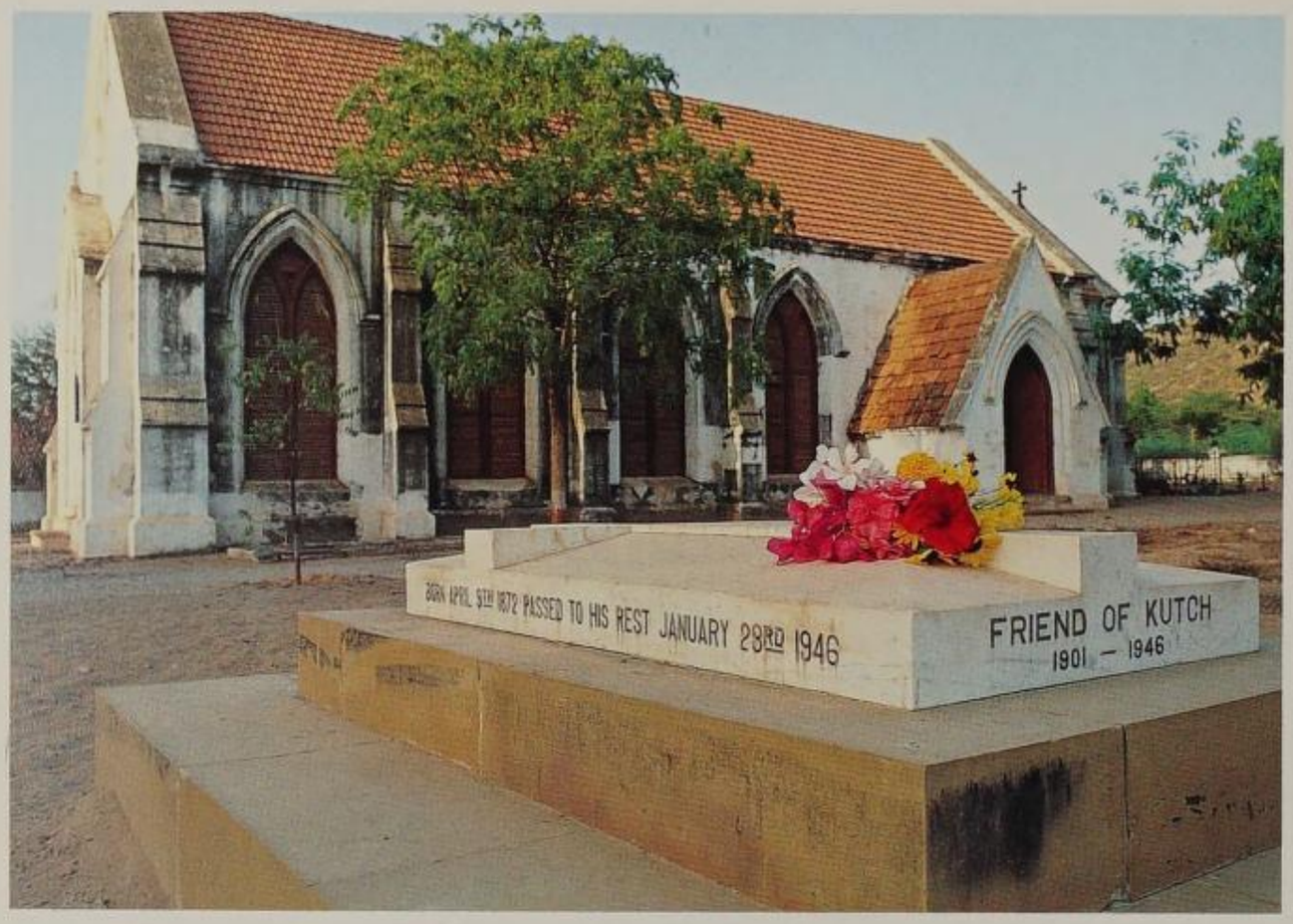
Left: Ghagra with extremely fine Mutva embroidery and (above) detail.

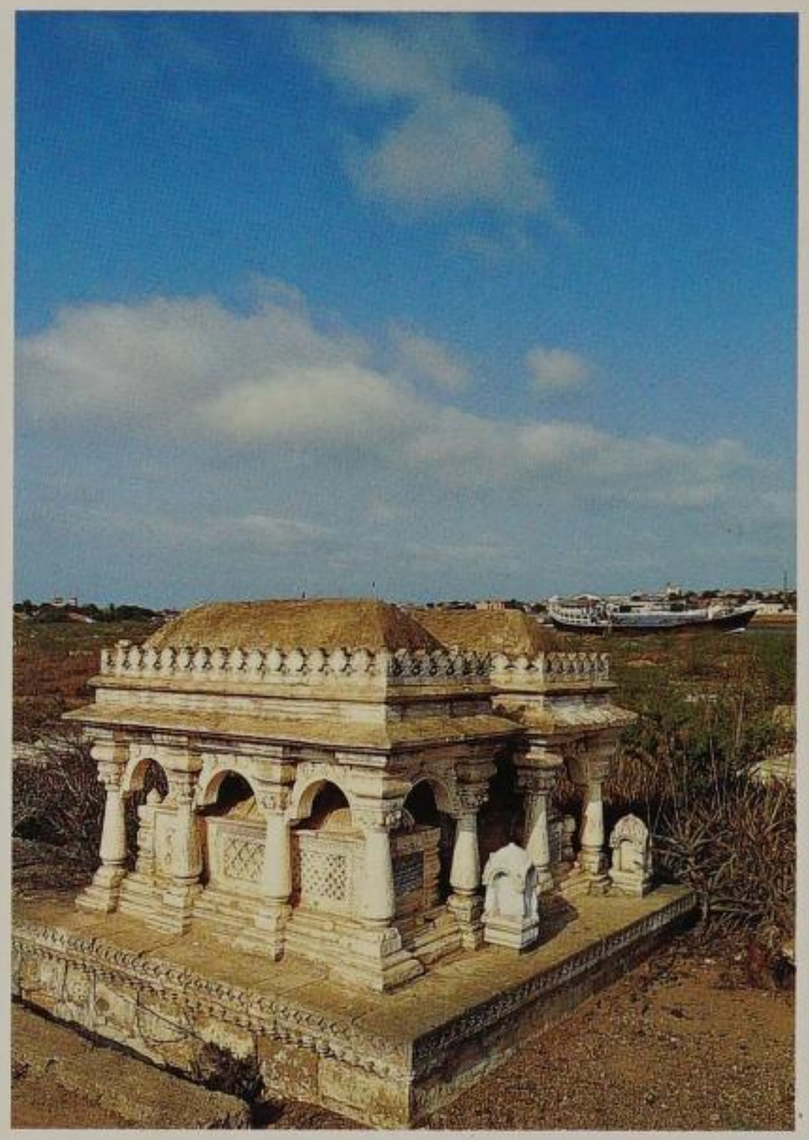
and there is a monument dedicated to her at Sumrasar, where they gather annually. The Garasia Jaths live mainly in the Nakhatrana region of Kachchh.

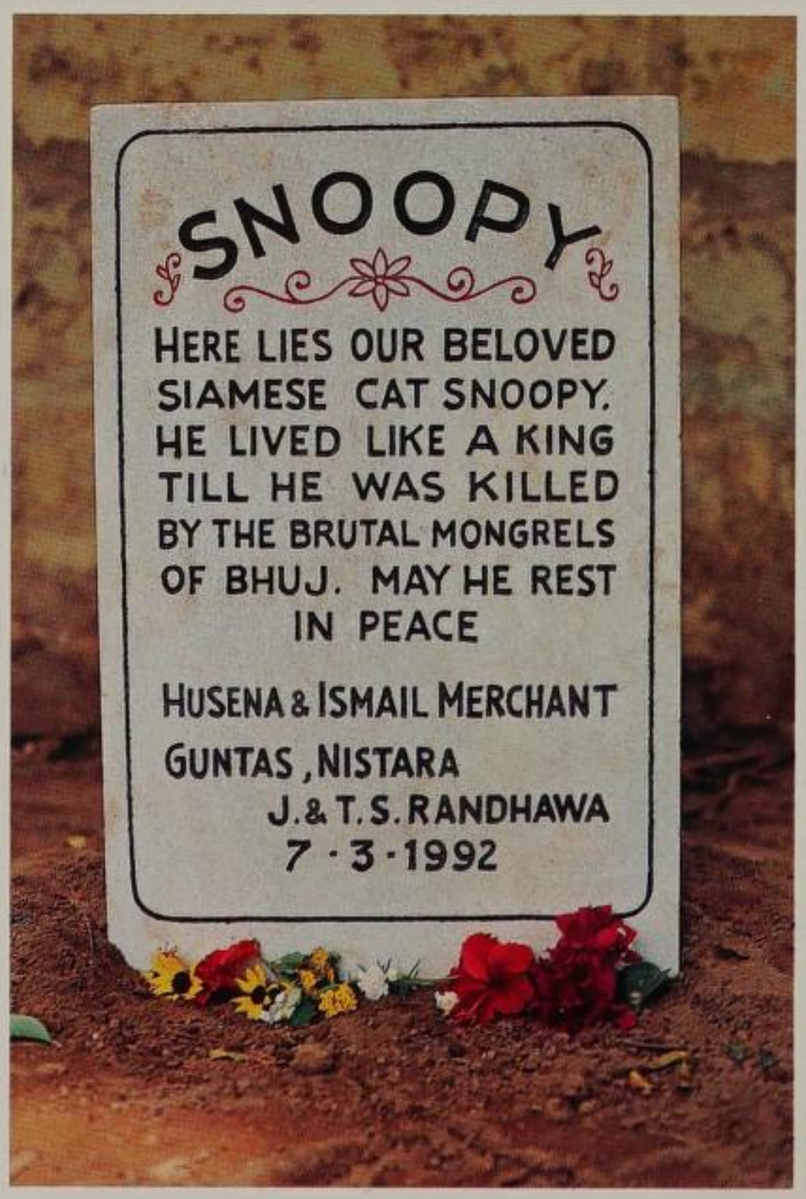
There is a sprinkling of Bharwads also in Kachchh, and they have spilled over from their home region of Kathiawar. There is a great concentration of Ahirs in Kachchh. Of their origins Campbell wrote, "The Ahirs or cowherds of ancient Hindu writings, sprung, according to Manu, from a Brahman man and an Ambastha or Vaid woman, according to the Brahma Puran from a Kshatriya father and a Vaisya mother, according to the Bhagvat Puran from Vaisya parents, and according to an old tradition from a Rajput slave girl and a Vaisya slave, they claim to be Vaisyas, but are by Brahmans classed as Sudras."

In and around Pacham are the Sammas. An interesting community is that of the Sodha Rajputs, some of whom have been settled in Kachchh in the recent past only, after coming from Pakistan. In other castled villages tribals like the Koli mingle with the normal population mix of Patels, Jadejas, Rajputs, Bhatias, Kayasths, Lohanas, Gosains, Gadhvis, Kapdis, Jains, Brahmans, Jogis, Banias, Bairagis, Sanghars, Bhanushalis, Bhadalas Syeds, Shaikhs, Pathans, Khojas, Memans, Miyanas, Sammas, Kharvas and Toris. Intermingling with them are the service groups and craftsmen: Wankars (weavers), Khatris (block printers), Kumbhars (potters), Sonis (gold and silversmiths), Suthars (carpenters), Kamangars (painters), Vanjas (silk and mashru weavers), Chudgars (bracelet makers), Salats (stone-workers), Ods (labourers), Meghwals (leather workers), Kansaras (coppersmiths), Lohars (blacksmiths) and Wadas (lacquer workers). There are the Bhats and Charans who are bards and geneaologists.

Above: Embroided wall-hanging in the bhavadia *stitch. Opposite page top: Embroidered Rabari* toran, *welcome banner. Opposite page below: Embroidered panels of the Ahirs.*







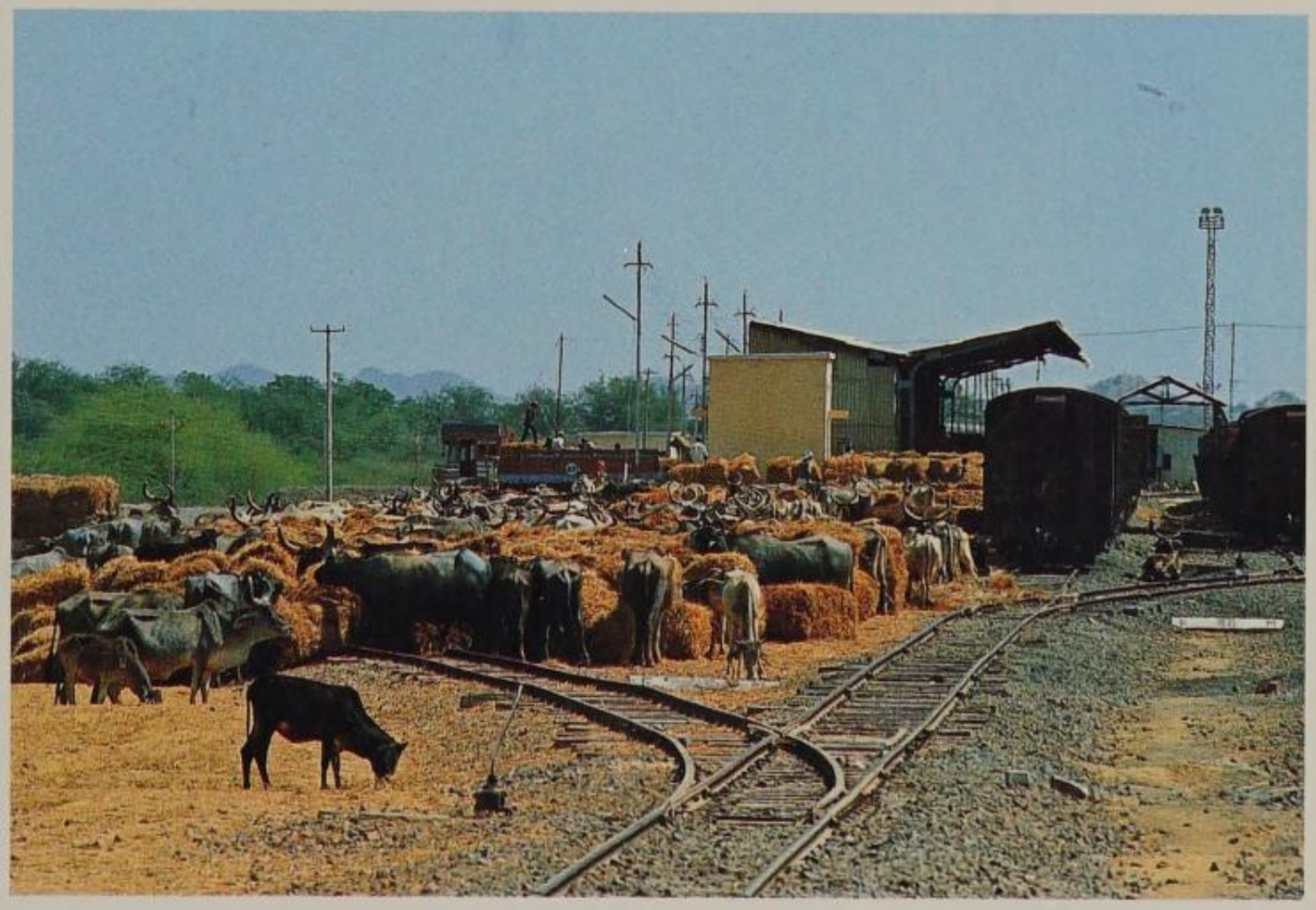
Above: The burial place in Bhuj of Reverend Smith, who spent forty-six years of his life in Kachchh as a teacher to the royal princes. Above right: Graves near Mandvi. Right: A modern-day memorial for a friend, Collector's residence, Bhuj.

RELIGION

Remarkable amity amongst different religious groups has been traditional in Kachchh. This openness to all religious faiths goes back to the common roots of the Jadejas and Sammas of Sindh. Such cohesion turned out to be of great politic value also and even though Muhammaden armies crossed the country, Kachchh was never considered ripe for a *jihad*. The Kachchh rulers paid equal reverence at temples, mosques and *dargahs* and though being Hindu, a good portion of their army was Muslim. The Kachchh *durbar* also gave protection and facilities to pilgrims going to Mecca.

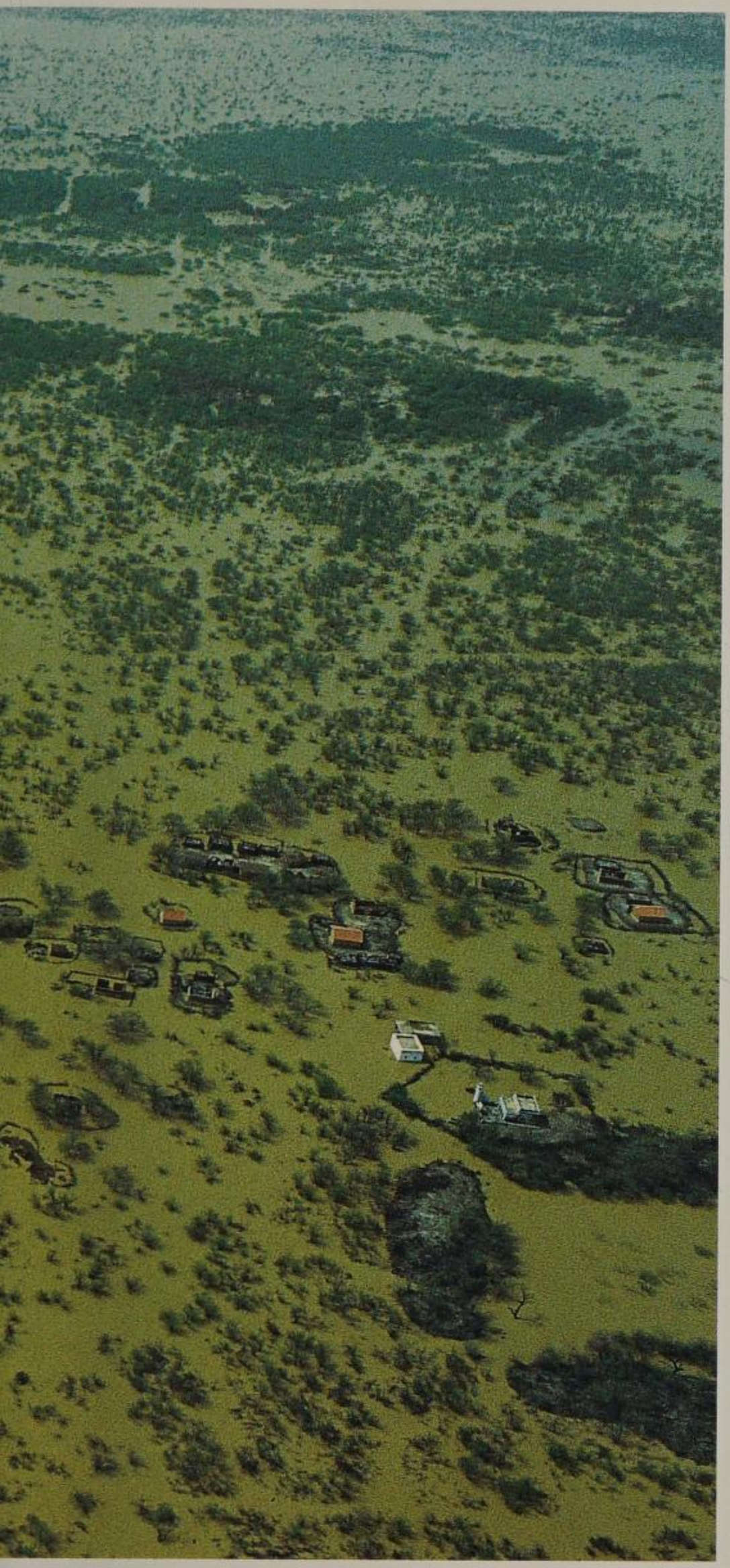
This cross-worship by different religious groups continues to this day. More interesting is the fact that apart from the orthodox streams, what prevails can best be described as popular religion – the worship of saints, mystics and heroes. The Kanphattas of Dhinodhar, Manfra and Kanthkot are celibate Shaivites and welcome members into their sect. The rulers too gave them great respect. The Pir, head, of the Than (Dhinodhar) monastery was invested by the Rao with a gold-bordered silk turban and was received by the holy man seated. Estates were given for their establishment which even now enables the Dhinodhar monastery to give hospitality to all visitors.

The saint Dhoramnath and his follower Garibnath are deeply venerated by their followers. Dhoramnath was the founder of the Kanphatta order the monks of which, in honour of Lord Shiva, pierce their ears and wear huge earrings. According to legend, around the tenth century he came to Kachchh for meditation. He selected a place under a tree in Raipur, near Mandvi. Dhoramnath began a twelve-year penance but was troubled by the local residents and not given the proper courtesies. Angered by



Above: Digging a tank for relief work during drought in Kachchh. Top: Trains of grass arriving at Bhuj, during drought, for dispatch by road to depots and cattle camps.

A rare occurrence – the Banni during floods – when even the peripatetic pastoralists are marooned in their hamlets and victuals have to be dropped by helicopter.



this he pronounced a curse, *"Pattan sub dattan"*. Raipur became deserted and the inhabitants migrated to the present site of Mandvi. Soon after Dhoramnath felt repentant and decided to do another penance on the top of Dhinodhar volcano. This was even more difficult than his earlier penance as he did it upside down, his head resting on a betel-nut. It was such an accomplishment that the gods requested him to desist but he replied that if he did so, in whichever direction he opened his eyes, the area would become barren. He was thus requested to open his eyes towards the north and the Great Rann came into being. When Dhoramnath came down from the hill he built the monastery at Than. The Kanphatta sect is a celibate order and newcomers are initiated by having their ears pierced. There is also a shrine on the crown of the volcano where Dhoramnath did his penance.

The monastery at Than passed through grand times. According to an account from the nineteenth century, quoted by Briggs, "The Pir.... wears very rich clothes.... His dress of honour consisted of a gold-bordered silk turban, a scanty waist-band, a sacred woollen neck-thread and a shawl a red or brick coloured scarf and wooden pattens. He was allowed to wear neither *angarka* nor leather shoes. Some of his ornaments were very valuable, and some very old. His earrings were of gold, very large and inlaid with gems. They were so heavy that they had to be supported by a string passed over his head. His finger rings were of gold and of the 'Kutch' pattern and his bracelets were broad and heavy. All the monks have their ears pierced (hence the name of the order) for enormous horn, glass or agate earrings, which distort their earlobes grotesquely. They are greatly respected for their charity and the simplicity of life." At Than, in a shed, is a sacred fire which continues to burn since the time of Dhoramnath. The Than Jagir is now under the management of the Collector and during 1992-93 major renovations have been carried out in an effort to restore the place to its former glory.

There are saints venerated by people irrespective of their religion. All nomads worship Mekan Dada, whose tomb lies on the southern edge of Banni at Dhrang. He was their saviour when they were lost in the Rann and used to wander in its vast stretches with a dog, Motia, and a donkey, Lalia, giving succour to lost and stranded nomads. Similarly, Savla Pir is venerated by Muslim and Hindu nomads of western Kachchh. The saint Murad Shah of Bokhara (also known as Shah Bokhari), whose tomb is at Mundra, is a patron of seafarers of all faiths.

The hilltops of Kachchh are marked by shrines of saints so remembered. At a high point on the coast of Mandvi a quaint shrine visible is that of Rawal Pir. It was rebuilt by two merchants in 1819. Rawal is said to have been born in the fourteenth century from a blister in the palm of his mother's hand, and gained favour of Dhoramnath by destroying some people who were troubling him.

The shrine of Pachhmai Pir is on the highest point of Kachchh – the top of Kala Dungar. His name is associated in history with the earliest rulers of Kachchh. He is identified with Guru Dattatraya because, like him, he used to have the companionship of a jackal while moving around, giving succour to people. Even till today when *prasad* is served by the priest scores of jackals appear from nowhere to feast.

A pair which was deified in the distant past was that of Jesal and Toral, at Anjar. "To the east of Ajeypal monastery is a small tiled shade with tombs of Jesa, a Jadeja, and his wife Toral, a Kathi. About the middle of the fourteenth century it is said Jesa became an outlaw, laid waste fields and villages, killed the people and carried off the cattle. At that time a Kathi woman, Toral by name, was famous for her devotion and her skill in making hymns, and still more famous for her beauty. She lived with an ascetic

called Savasdhir, who did not regard her as his wife but as one who would bring him salvation. The fame of her beauty reached Jesa, who tried to carry her off by force but failed. Going back in the guise of an ascetic he was well received. He arranged to see her at midnight. His plans were found out, and on his confessing, the sect whose rule was to grant the wish of every asker, gave him Toral on condition that he became an ascetic. Jesal agreed but soon tiring of the restraint, again tried to carry off Toral by force" (Campbell). But she was too clever. She foiled the elopement and reformed him.

One of the pleasant duties of the Collector of Kachchh is to preside over the government appointed Devasthan Committee which oversees the management of the historic shrines of Kachchh, forty in all, which include Koteshwar, Narayansarovar, Manfra, Ajepal, Jesal-Toral, Kanthkot, Peeran Pir and Fateh Muhammad's tomb. There are also many other shrines under the management of local trusts – Mata-no-Madh, Bhadreshwar, Mota Jakh, amongst others. In western Kachchh are the *panch-tirth*, the five temples at Naliya, Jakhau, Suthri, Kothara and Tera, sacred to the Jain community. The Swaminarayan sect commands a good following and has a large establishment at Bhuj.

The temple at Mata-no-madh, amongst the most sacred in Kachchh, is managed by priests of the Kapdi order. According to legend, the temple was built after Mod's son dreamt that he was to search for a stream on the banks of which he would find some grain of an unusual colour. Two pious Bania brothers were entrusted with the search. When they found the place they built a small temple. The goddess showed approval by playing music at night and indicated that the brothers were to close the shrine for six months, after which the goddess would manifest herself in tangible form. Because of the over-zealousness of one of the brothers, the shrine was opened too early. The goddess's form therefore remains partly emerging from the substance of a great block of rock. The effect is impressive as though the image of the goddess were in the process of emerging into full view through some natural convulsion of the rock.

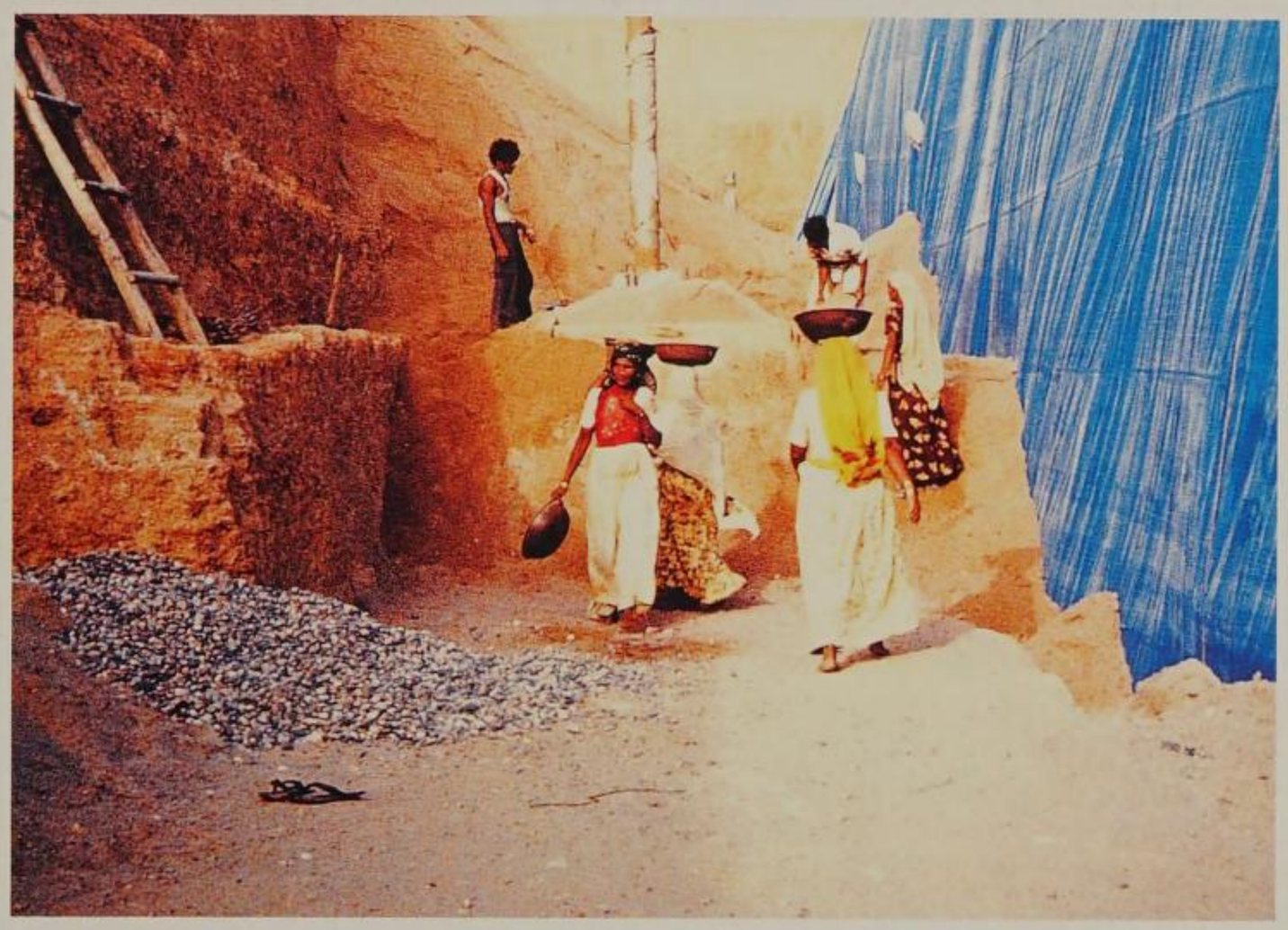
Not much remains of the former greatness of Koteshwar, "the ten million Gods," except a very scenic temple on the edge of the Kori creek. It is supposed to be Huien Tsang's "Kie-tsi-shi-fa-lo on the western frontier of the country close to the river Indus and to the great ocean". It was five miles around and there were eighty convents with about five thousand devotees. The present temple was built by the two seths, Sunderji and Jetha Shivji. The porch has three domes and placed under the central dome is a large and beautiful brass bull presented by Rao Desal I (1718-1741), in the right dome a large statue of Hanuman, and in the left dome one of Ganpati. In the main shrine is a *shivling* of the kind called *svayambu*, self-born. In ancient times, the temple priest was a Nath of the Kanphatta order but some generations ago it was taken over by the Atit sect.

Narayansarovar is an important place of pilgrimage, close to Koteshwar. It is considered to be one of the five holy lakes in India. Near the lake is the fortified temple complex as well as many other scattered temples, including some cave temples, the more important one being Shesh gupha. Vagheli Mahakunvar, the wife of Rao Desalji I, displeased with the Dwarka priest, determined to raise Narayansarovar to be a place of rival sanctity. In 1734 she built the temples of Laxminarayan and Trikamray in the style of the Dwarka temples. Later she built the temples of Adinarayan, Govardhannath, Dwarkanath, and Laxmiji. The temple of Trikamray resembles the one at Koteshwar. The shrine is paved with white and black marble and the doors plated in silver. Inside, on a silver throne, stands the black marble image of Trikamray and next to it is the black marble figure of Vishnu's eagle, *garud*, with clasped hands and kneeling on one leg. Over the image of Trikamray are gold and silver parasols, offerings of devotees.

After a good monsoon there is a resurgence of religious activity. With nomadic families returning to Kachchh the air becomes festive with colourful celebrations. The season opens with a great gathering at Ravechi Mata's temple. Almost simultaneously the Rabari nomads of Anjar meet at Varsha Medi for naming their children at a nocturnal gathering. A few days later they gather with their animals to worship their deity Momai Mata, whose temple is in the very picturesque mountains of Kotda-Chakar, near Bhuj. The Rabaris camp there for two nights. The colourful *melas* of Ramdev Pir and that of Mota Jakh follow. Other smaller fairs are also held, including those at Varnu, Mai Bhambi, Dhinodhar, Dhrang and the one at Savla Pir, on a mangrove mud island accessible only by a one-hour boat ride from Koteshwar. During the great congregations of Haji Pir and Mata-no-Madh, one sees thousands of people, led on by their faith, undertaking long marches to the shrines on foot, on the fulfilment of their vows. Also taking place throughout the year are the mainstream religious celebrations like Dussehra, Diwali, Holi and Id, among others, until the scorching sun puts an end to the annual cycle.

The following is a list of the more interesting local fairs along with the approximate schedule in the english calendar.
January – Varnudada, Rapar; Mai Bhambi, Sumrasar Jath. February – Guru Dattatraya, Kala Dungar; Mekandada, Dhrang; Dhoramnath, Dhinodhar. March – Abda Adbhang, Abdasa: Piro-no-Pir, Bhuj; Haji Pir, Nakhatrana; Mota Pir, Chirai; Ashar Mata, Layja.

April – Savla Pir, off Koteshwar, Kori creek; Ramwada; Abdasa; Vandhay, Mundra; Chandarwa Hill, Lakhond; Sukansha Pir, Nakhatrana; Ekal Mata, Bharudia; Shravan Kavad, Banni; Matia Pir, Gudatar, Ganesh Dada, Baroi, Luni and Tera; Shitla Mata, Mandvi and Mundra; Mamai Dev, Trayanjar; Chhata Pir, Vadala. July – Suralbhit, Bhuj; August – Gokul Ashtmi, all over Kachchh; Raval Pir, Dhabudi; Abda Akhada, Anjar. September – Mahakaleshwar, Anjar; Nana Yaksh, Madhapar; Tapkeshwari, Bhuj; Varsamedi, Anjar; Ravechi Mata, Rav; Pachmai Pir, Kala Dungar; Ramdev Pir, Vijpasar; Panjora Pir, Bhachau; Sagwari Mata, Khadir, Alisha Pir, Nanadasar. October – Takiya Pir, Jangi; Mota Yaksha, Sairai; Pankadsha. Pir, Bhachau; Jogninar, Vira; Havnasthami, Matanomad; Momaymora, Rapar. November – Lilasha Pir, Adipur; Kartika Purnima, Narayan Sarovar.



Top: In a good year rain waters rushing towards Hamirsar lake, Bhuj. Above: An underground dyke being built by the Vivekananda Research Training Institute, Mandvi, which has done pioneering work for tackling the problem of water shortage in Kachchh by recharging underground aquifers.

Rabari nomads moving on to greener pastures. They return to Kachchh just before the summer monsoon season.

An interesting character who stands out in the craft traditions of Kachchh is Ramsinh Malam. He was originally a navigator from Kathiawar and during his shipping activity, after being shipwrecked and rescued by a Dutch ship found his way to the Netherlands. There he picked up the arts of gun casting, clock making, tile making, glass blowing and architecture. When he returned to India he found a patron, not in his native land but in Kachchh, in the person of Rao Lakha. He began to practise the skills he had learnt. Ramsinh, it appears, was quite at ease with motifs ranging from merry Dutch knaves with wine goblets (old Mandvi palace) to Hindu gods, animals, flowers and dancing girls. When he came to Kachchh he was fortunate not only because Rao Lakha took a great liking to him, but also due to the fact that the treasury was bursting. His work is evident in Kachchh even today, whether it is the old palace at Mandvi, Rao Lakhaji's *chatri*, cenotaph, or the famous Aina Mahal, Palace-of-Mirrors. The Aina Mahal is a remarkable creation – in its use of marble, mirrors, elaborate chandeliers and other ornamentation. It also has an interesting collection of clocks, paintings and other objects. Its inside is well shaded from direct sunlight and it has a fountain which was operated by an ingenious system of network siphons. However, not all chroniclers could appreciate it. Colonel James Tod had this to write after his visit to Aina Mahal: "This gorgeous bauble, on which were expended eighty lakhs of *Kories* (more than three years' revenue of the crown lands of Kutch) implies neither taste nor judgement in the founder, Rao Lakha, who thus despatched the treasure accumulated by the frugality of his predecessor. Its interior is of white marble, literally inlaid with mirrors, each separated by gilded ornaments. The ceiling from which lustres are pendent, is painted in fresco; and the floor, which is laid with China tiles, was covered with Dutch and English chiming-clocks, which were all set a going at once, forming a 'true Dutch chorus' while shelves about the centre of the hall were covered with all sorts of glass-ware, like a pawnborker's shop, the resemblance being not a little increased by a variety of glass figures, which decorated the walls themselves. In the centre of this costliness, is placed the pallet of Rao Lakha, that in which he died, which stands on golden or gilded feet... A verandah surrounds this hall, the floor of which is also tiled and a strange anomalous collection of portraits adorns its walls: Rana Jugget Singh of Mewar in contact with the Empress Catherine of Russia! Raja Bukt Singh of Marwar and Hogarth's Election, with other Flemish, English, and Indian subjects, intermingling with the princes of Kutch from the first Rao, Khengar, to the present time." Ramsinh's crowning work was the cenotaph he made for his patron – Rao Lakha's *chatri* at Hamirsar, Bhuj. It has great embellishments and was executed with superb craftsmanship, the motifs including dancing girls on the capitals.

Life in the desert has shaped the crafts of the area and the stark landscape of Kachchh serves better to intensify the colours. Using simple materials the craftsmen create objects of great beauty, filling their lives and bleak surroundings with a colourful vitality. The remoteness of the land has ensured that the crafts have remained free from influences of the industrial age. The people depend considerably on local craftsmen and village industries for items of daily use – block printing, *batik*, tie-and-dye, leather

Rabari girls at Dhrang.

footwear, earthen pots and silver jewellery.

In addition to the goods made by village artisans, there are family activities which are keeping Kachchh traditions alive, especially embroidery. The work is extremely intricate with an incredible variety of motifs and stitches. Women of most communities wear richly embroidered garments. Various tribes in Kachchh specialise in certain types of embroidery. It is easy to identify by the pattern worn by a woman which community or group, or even village, she belongs to. There has been a great borrowing and lending of patterns with neighbouring areas of the region. Their embroidery reflects their life-styles and beliefs. It adds vibrant colour to their existence and is an extensive family activity. A girl's dowry trousseau is very affectionately embroidered and the work starts the day a daughter is born.

The finest embroidery is done by women of the nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes, worked at when the menfolk are away tending the animals. Considerable outside influence is evident in terms of embroidery techniques, colour and material, perhaps due to the earlier seafaring and overland trading with the Middle East, Africa, Europe, China, Central Asia, and also to foreign invasions and migrations. One can see the influences of the Cretan stitch of Greece, surface interlacing stitches from Armenia and the French tambouring techniques. Their embroidery is a reflection of their life-style of shifting horizons, camels, peacocks, parrots, flowers, shrubs, trees and women churning milk. Each pattern tells a story. The cut of the women's dresses, the colour, motif and style of embroidery on the garments are all related to the age of the wearer, group affiliation, marital status and, very subtly, even the village or camp – a complete identification of the wearer. For example, amongst the Rabaris of Kachchh the three main sections are distinguished by the embroidery on their *odhnis* (veils which are draped over the head and shoulders). The Wagadia Rabaris embroider only the borders while Kachela Rabaris girls prefer bold medallion designs in the centre, though sometimes the pattern may be repeated at the corners. The Dhebaria Rabari usually leave their *odhnis* unadorned, except for a little bit of red tie-and-dye pattern on the black background of the material. Similarly, the yokes on the gowns of nomadic Dhanetah Jath women of Kachchh are embroidered according to the status of the wearer – teenagers mainly wear the *khacha kanu* design of flower motifs; the marriage *chunri* aptly has the design of newly blossoming buds; the *phuladi* pattern of circular motifs representing open blossoms is worn by young mothers; and widows wear patterns without mirrors. Applique patchwork of the Kachchhi nomadic groups, is also quite remarkable.

In 1968, when there was drought in Kachchh, an institution called Shrujan was established by Chandaben Shroff with the intention of supplementing the income of rural women by giving them embroidery work and marketing their products. This gradually created a tremendous demand, starting an ethnic wave in women's wear in the metropolitan cities of India. The demand has since continued and increased, resulting in a resurgence of this craft.

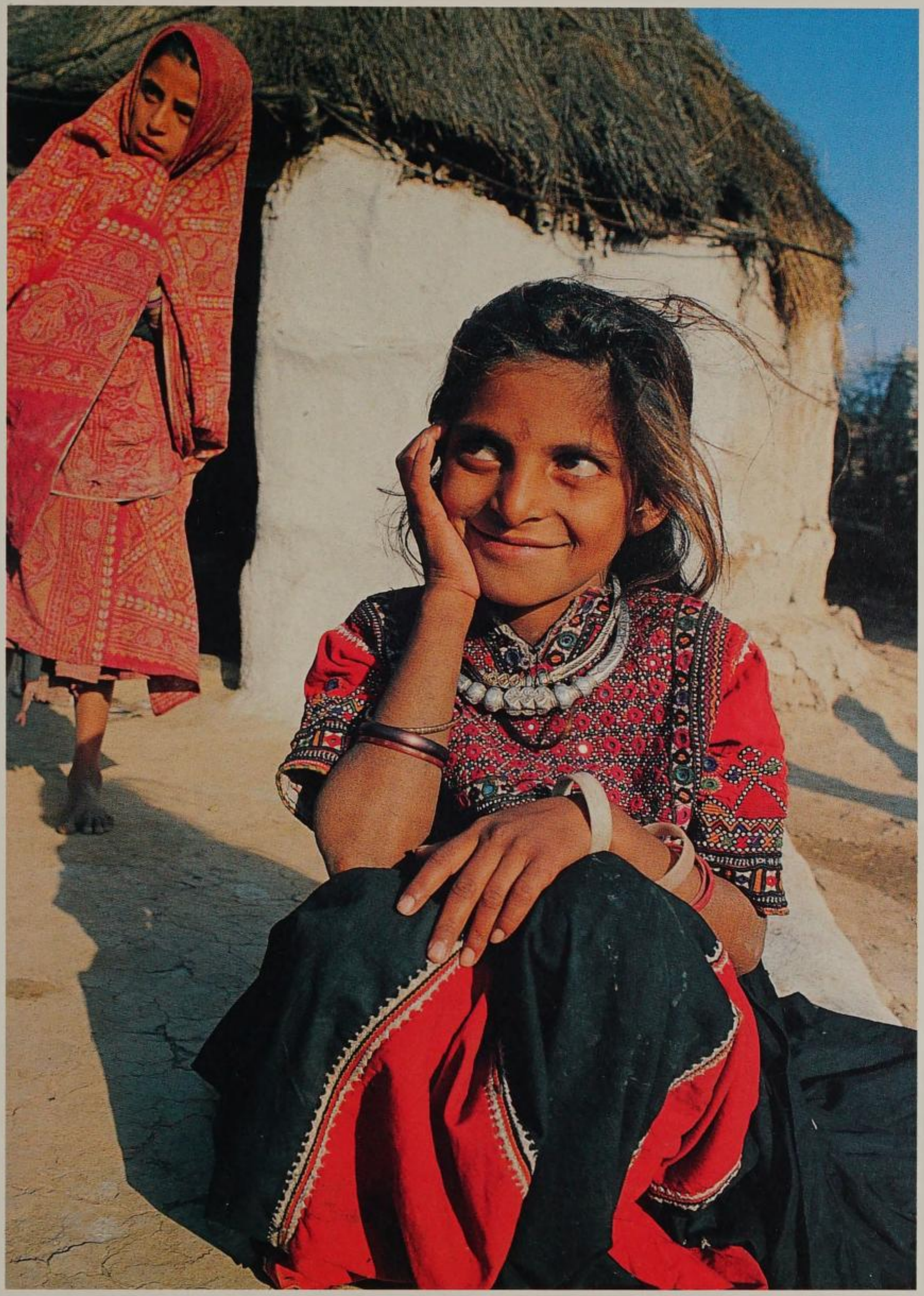
The earlier style of painting of Kachchh also deserves mention. The artists of Kamangar families used to make shields for nobles from imported rhinoceros hides. Once finished they were painted in vibrant colours. During peace-time these artists indulged in painting murals and on paper. One refinement they had, compared to Rajasthani painting, was the embedding of real gems and pearls in the paint to give a three-dimensional effect. At present only a few such families remain and the art, like all other traditional life-styles, is becoming extinct. Slowly, in Kachchh, tradition is being overtaken by forces of modernity.

Appendix

As many visitors are interested in the handicrafts of Kachchh, I am detailing a list of villages in which the people excel in particular crafts. This list will also be helpful in knowing where particular communities are located.

Embroidery: Dhebar Rabari – Makhiyan, Padhdhar, Bhadroi, Mamuara, Nadapa, Raydhanpar, Varnora and Dudhai; **Kachchhi Rabari** – Madhapar, Gada, Bhujodi, Sanosara, Kodki, Makhana, Bharapar, Beru, Chakar, Devpar Gadhwali, Fotdi, Momaymora, Morjar, Meghpar, Kotda, Mankuva, Naththarkui, Nakhatrana Nana, Tunda Vandh, Vadva Kanya and Bhojrajwari Vandh; **Garasia Jath** – Pirwadi, Sumrasar Jathwari, Mai-no-pad, Kamaguna, Dolatpar, Ashaladi, Vidi, Naranpar, Mankuva, Zura Jathwandh, Hothiyay and Tanknasar; **Dhanetah Jath** – Tal, Laiyari, Odi Vandh, Bitiyari, Burkal, Chhachhalu, Bhagadia, Nana Bhitara, Gunau, Kanoj, Khanot, Karanwari, Lakhania, Motichur, Bhagad Mota, Morachban, Fulra, Ustia, Umiya, Uthongadi, Sarado, Bhagadmora, Jhalu, Ravrasar, Shobhapar, Rajivandh, Luna and Bhaiwsari Vandh; **Sodha** – Kuran, Loriya, Jhura, Bibbar, Kharadia, Godhiar, Orrira, Gichada, Chhari, Reha Nana, Chher, Sumrasar Shekh, Pragpar, Baraya, Siracha, Kharadia, Kapurasi, Kuriyani, Faradi and Dador; **Ahir** – Madhapar, Ratnal, Padhdhar, Nadapa, Mamura, Habay, Jawaharnagar Kanaiyabe, Jhinkadi, Dagala, Lodai, Dhrang, Sugaria, Nokhania, Sanghad, Mathak, Chandrani Kotda, Bhuwad, Tappar, Vadwara and Dhaneti; **Mutwa** – Adhiyang, Pannawari, Mithadi, Udo, Siniyado, Gorewali, Dhordo, Fulay and Patghar; **Meghwal** – Bhirandiara, Misariyado, Sadai, Dummado, Gorewali, Dhordo, Ludia, Khavda, Dinara, Dhrobana, Kuran, Dhorawar, Tuga, Jam Kunaria, Bhojardo, Dharampar, Andhau, Khari, Ratadia and Akau; **Mukuoh** – Sadai, Neri, Khawda, Dumado and Bhirandiara; **Mochi** – Kidiyanagar; **Kabira** – Sadai, Hodka Shethwari Vandh, Dumado, Dhrobana and Dhorawar; **Samma** – Dhrobana, Kotda, Mota, Dinara Nana, Dhandhi, Paiya, Tuga, Jhuna and Jam Kunaria; **Halepotra** – Sadai, Vad, Erandawali, Karanwari, Neri, Dumado, Udai, Thakariyado, Reldi, Hodka, Nathvani Vandh, Shethwari and Karimwari Vandh; **Raisipotra** – Bhirandiara and Ghadiyado; **Lohana** – Bhuj, Khavda and Madhapar; **Node** – Dadhhar and Neri; **Leuva Patel** – Dudhai, Morgar, Kabrau, Kumbharia, Bhachau, Vondh, Khirai, Pragpar and Rapar; **Pathan** – Jararwari and Vadli; **Baloch** – Chobari and Dhrang.

Patchwork: – Bhirandiara, Hodka, Gorewali, Dumado, Dhrobana, Thikariyado, Dhordo and Luna; **Jadeja patchwork** – Hothivandh, Chavadka, Bibbar, Aral, Gichada, Mudiya, Jadai, Vandhai, Naredi, Reha Nana and Mota. **Cow bells** – Jhura and Nirona. **Wood work** – Dumado, Ludia, Khavda, Kapurasi, Kuriyani and Jhinkadi. **Lacquer** – Nirona, Jhura, Gorewali, Dumado, Bhirandiara and Luna. **Pottery** – Jambudi, Lodai, Bhuj, Khedoi, Madhapar, Anjar and Gundiali. **Felt** – Mundra, Todia, Gagodar and Chitrod. **Nutcrackers** – Reha Nana, Anjar and Kothara. **Leather** – Jhura, Nirona, Bibbar, Bhirandiara, Misariyado, Hodka, Gorewali, Dumado, Dhordo, Pragpar, Sumrasar Shekh, Dhrobana, Jhuna, Khavda, Kuran, Dholavira and Dinara. **Batik** – Mundra, Anjar, Bhujpar and Bhuj. **Tie and dye** – Bhuj, Mandvi, Anjar, Mundra, Dhamadka, Nalia, Tera, Bara and Rapar, Virani, Bhadli. **Block printing** – Dhamadka, Bhujpur, Bhuj, Bela, Mandvi, Dhori, Tera and Khavda. **Tassels** – Udo, Gorewali, Mithadi, Pannawari, Patghar, Siniyado and Dhordo. **Copper engraving** – Bhuj and Anjar. **Silver** – Anjar, Bhuj, Dudhai, Deshalpar Muru and Mandvi. **Mashru weaving** – Mandvi, Salaya, Don, Godhara, Dedhia and Rayan. **Rug and shawl weaving** – Adhoi, Bidada, Bandhra Mota, Bhujodi, Kukma, Vadva, Jambudi, Ningal, Jamthada, Kandherai, Kotay, Dudhai, Siracha, Sanyra, Sarli, Khambara, Gangod, Hatdi, Pirwadi and Mankuva. **Kharal weaving** – Tuga and Kuran. **Rogan** – Chobari and Nirona. **Locks** – Suthari and Nalia. **Stuffed toys** – Bandhara and Madhapar.



Garasia Jath girl

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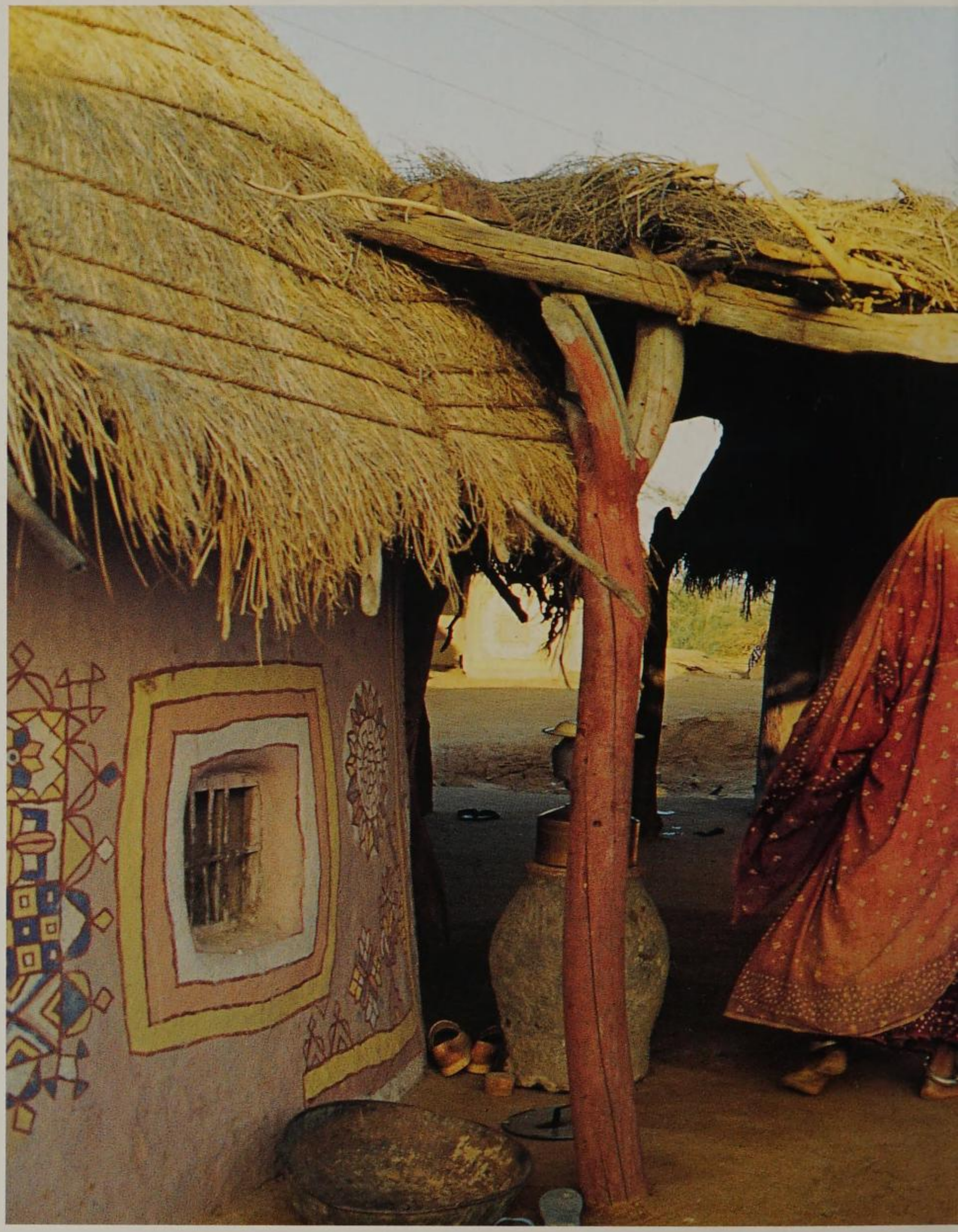
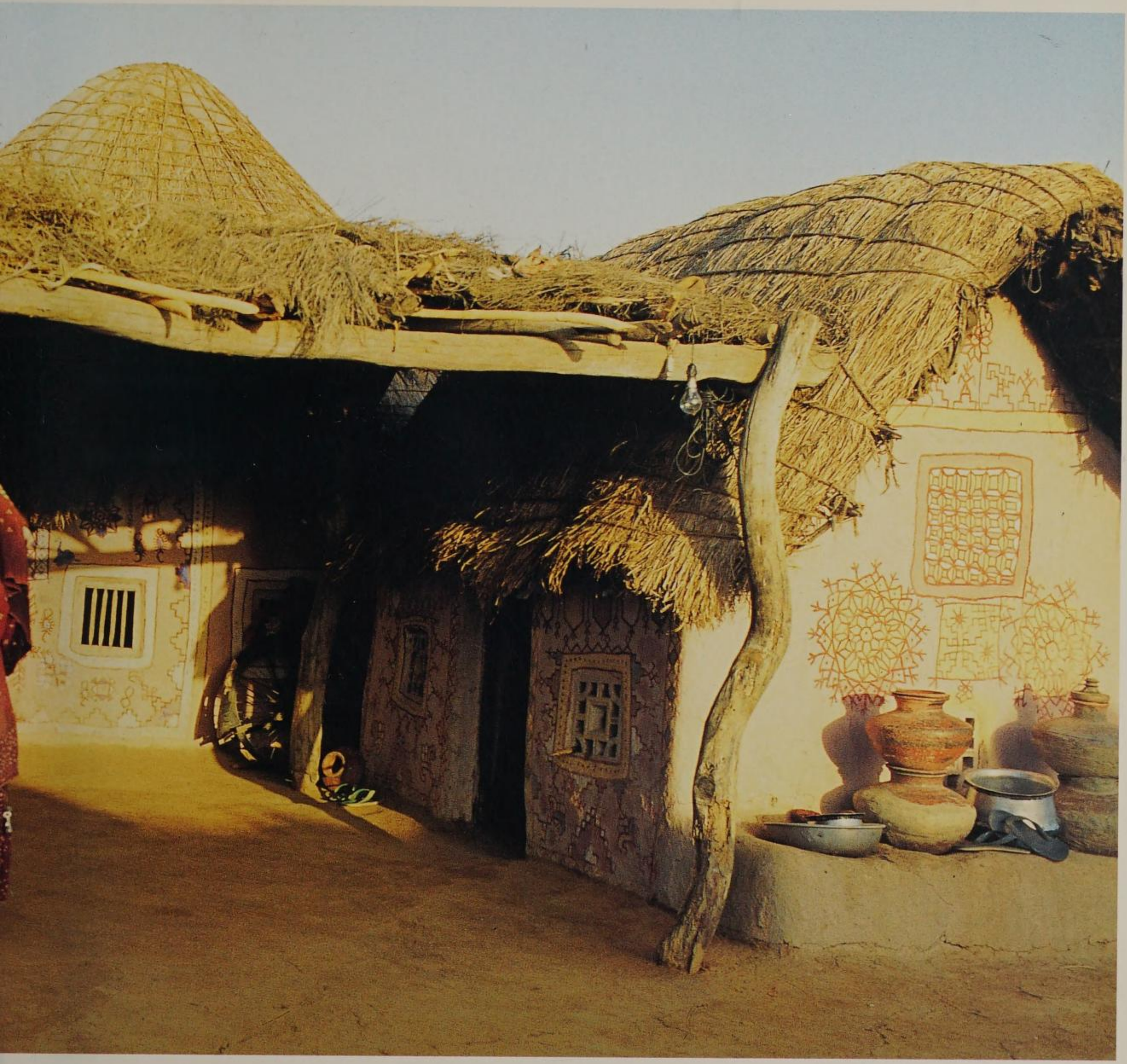
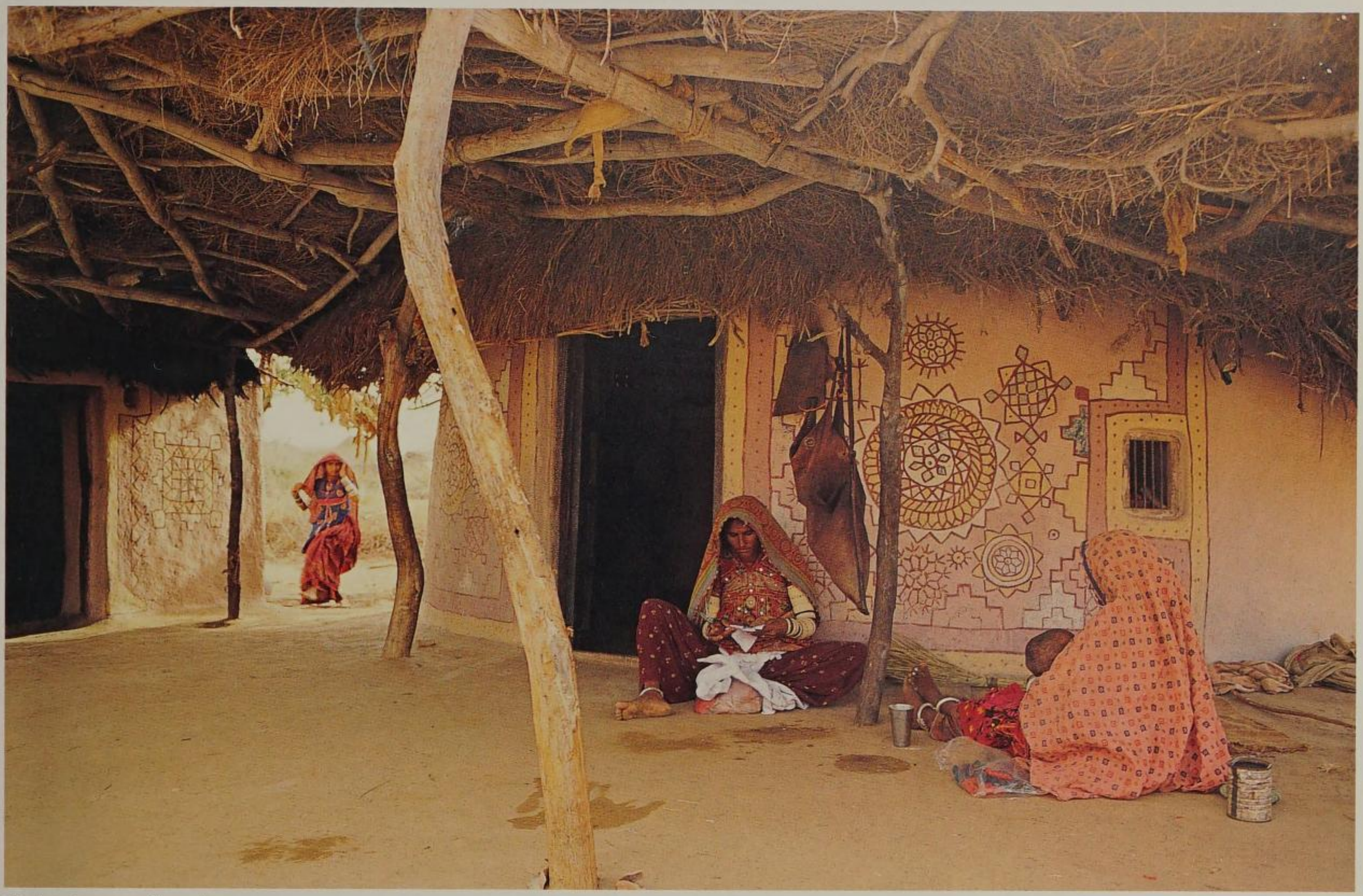
Dhanetah Jath woman



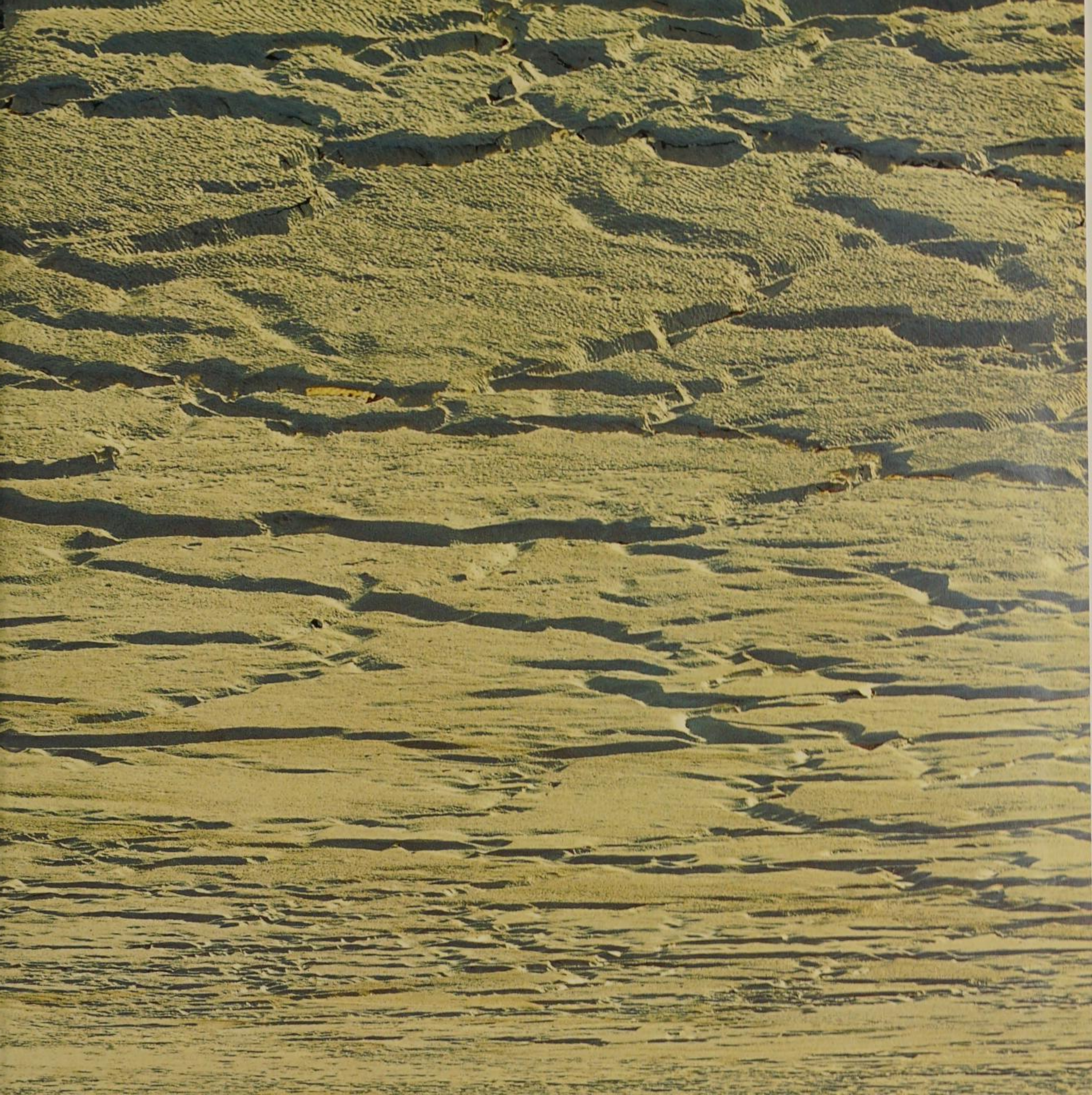
A Meghwal family's shelter, Banni. Minerals and clay are used for wall decoration.



Dwarfed by its intensity, cows cross the Great Rann in search for grass on islands.



Meghwal women, Banni.



GREAT RANN OF KACHCHH
KORI CREEK
Lokhpat
Chher
Siyot
Kapurashi
Koteshwar
Narayan Sarowar
Subhashpur
Dayapar
Daulatpar
Pipar
Baranda
Mata-no-Madh
Bharapar
Ramvav
Wayor
Tramban
Tera
Nalia
Jakhau
Lala
Sindhori
Kothara
Pingleshwar
Suthri
Chhachhi
Jara
Nara
Luna
Hajipir
Bhitara
Mithadi
Kero
Dungar
Bhagadia
Chhachhlo
Fulay
Chhary
Dhinodhar Dungar
Than
Dhordo
Duhodo
Hodka
Serwo
Bibar
Niruna
Jhura
Netra
Nakhtarana
Jatwadi
Vichhio
Kakadbhit
Punvro-no-Gadh
Roha
Chadwa Rakhal
Gadhsisa
Kotadi
Ratadia
Mankuwa
Mirzapar
Kera
Pundi
Gajod
Mandvi
Tunda Wandh
Dhrab
Mundra
Bhadreswar
Tuna
Antarjal
Kandla Port
Gandhi Dham
Mithi Rohar
Sanosara
Jambudi
Sapeda
Varsamedi
Anjar
Janghi
Surajbari
Shikarpar
Bhachhu
Vondh
Samakhiali
Adhoi
Kumbhardi
Lakharawandh
Banigri
Dhamadka
Nodapa
Dhaneti
Tapar
Ratnal
Bhujodi
BHUJ
Madhapar
Gado
Lakhond
Andhau
Kuran
Dinara
Nirwandh
Kala Dungar
Khavda
Rabyiri
Kunaria
Mindiara
Tuga
Dholavira
Khadir
Gadhada
Balasar
Lodrani
Bela
Mouana
Gedi
Fatehgadh
Ravechi
Rapar
Ekal Wandh
Chobari
Manfara
Lakhagadh
Adesar
Kanthkot
Gagodar
Varnu
Chitrod
Bhadreswar
Berdo
Sumrasar
Dhrang
Kotai
Lodai
Habai
Bhirandiara
Misriado
Bhojardo
Dadhar
LITTLE RANN OF KACHCHH
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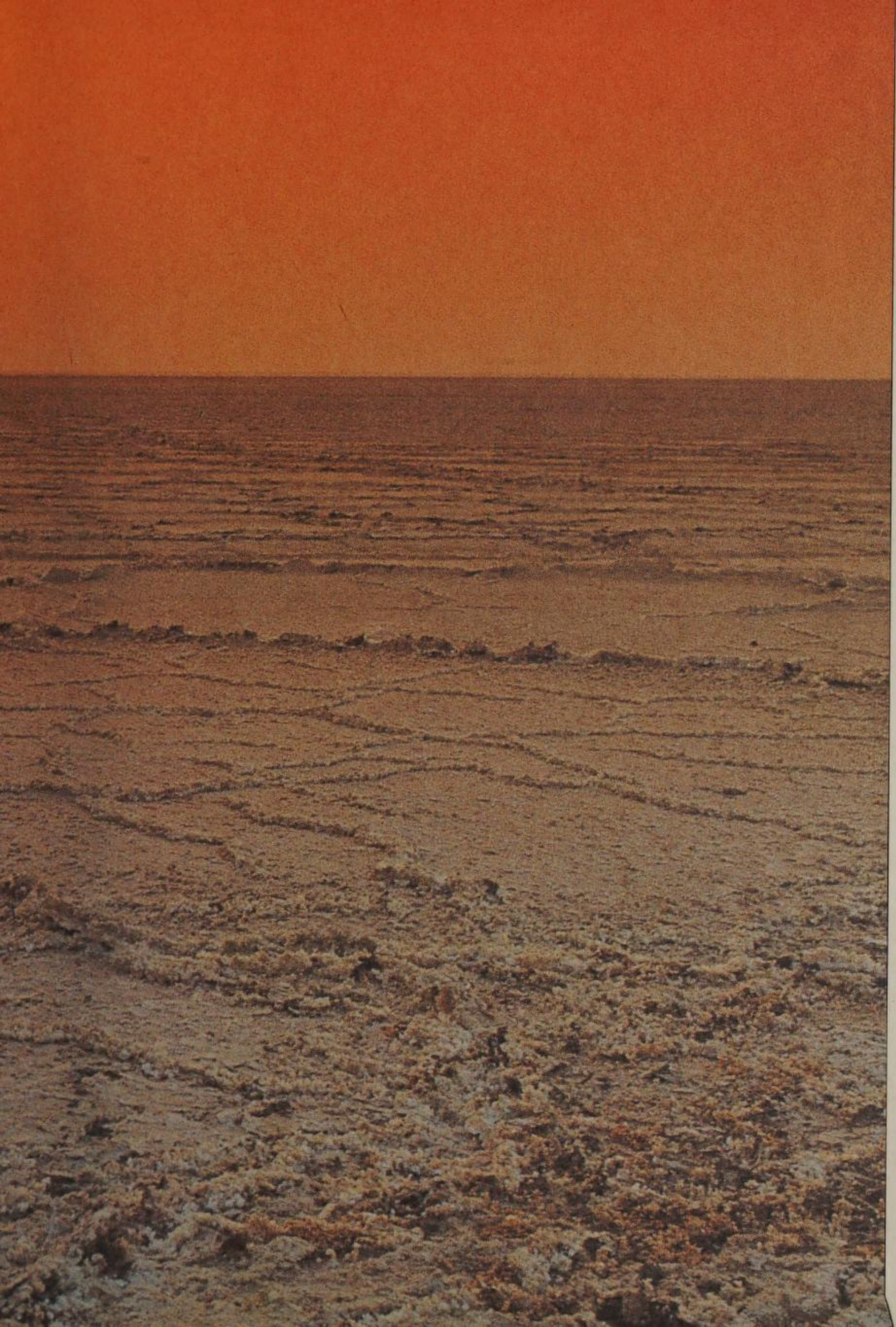

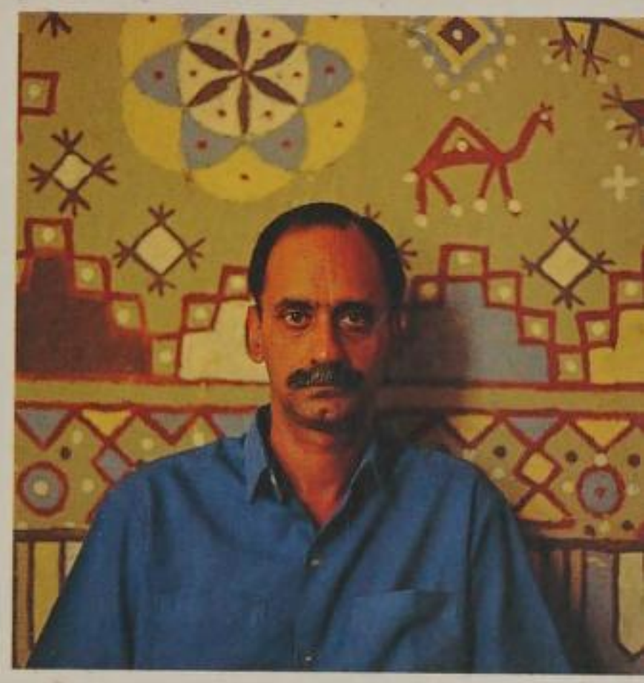

Tejinder Singh Randhawa graduated from the Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur, and joined the Indian Administrative Service.
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ISBN 81-7234-011-7

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